OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY

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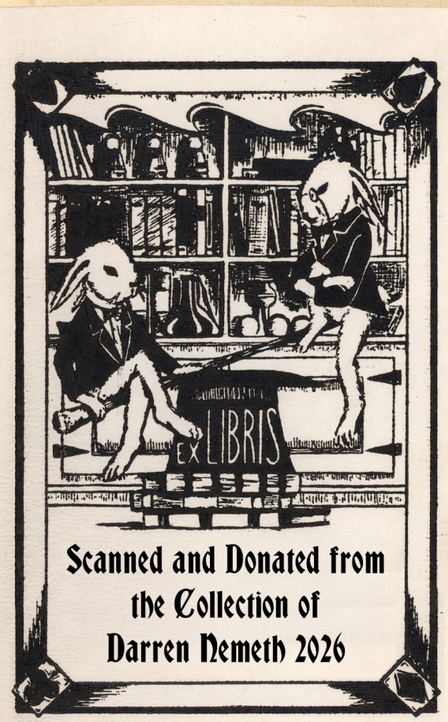
by "OLD SLEUTH"



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OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY

A Series of

THE MOST THRILLING DETECTIVE STORIES EVER PUBLISHED

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TRAPPING THE MOONSHINERS

OR

The Strange Adventures of a Government Detective in the Tennessee Mountains

By "OLD SLEUTH."

CHAPTER I.

A WELL-DRESSED man, slightly above the medium height, with fine features, keen gray eyes, and a bearded face, was just stepping aboard a night train at Washington.

A missile whistled past the bearded man's temple.

A cry at once arose from an excited individual, who exclaimed:

"It was a woman!"

The man, who had most certainly been the intended victim, was the coolest person among the excited crowd gathered on the platform.

He walked over to the man who had said it was a woman, and whispered to him:

"Keep quiet."

"But I saw her," said the excited passenger.

"Never mind; come this way."

The passengers gathered in groups, talking over the exciting episode, while the victim, accompanied by the witness, took a seat in a rear car.

"You saw the woman?" said the man in as cool a tone as though talking about the most ordinary occurrence.

"I did."

"Describe her."

"I can't describe her more than to say it was a woman, and that she was veiled."

The bearded man drew a small flask from his pocket, and said:

"Take a drink."

The eye-witness of the affair drank and accepted the cigar that the bearded man offered.

After a few puffs he said, in a musing tone:

"Come to think, it was a young and handsome woman."

"I thought so," remarked the bearded man.

"You thought what?"

"That a few points would recur to your recollection as soon as you had calmed down a bit."

"You are a cool 'un," said the man, puffing away.

"Never mind talking about me. How was the woman dressed?"

"All in black."

"What color was her hair?"

She was a blonde."

"What was the color of her eyes?"

"I would swear they were blue."

"And jewels on her hand?"

"Didn't notice."

"Why didn't you seize her?"

"She disappeared like a shadow; and, on my life, though I have described her appearance so well, I could not tell at this moment in which direction she fled."

"I am much obliged to you, and I reckon I will find her," said the bearded man; and he bid good-day to the man who had been an eye-witness of the attempt on his life.

It was some ten minutes before the train was to start.

The man who had run such a narrow squeak for his life passed around behind a number of baggage-cars standing on a side track, and instantly a most wonderful metamorphosis occurred in his appearance.

The heavy beard was removed, and his clothing was changed, as it were, in the twinkling of an eye.

Having completely transformed himself, the man returned to the platform and mingled among the passengers who were gathered just before the starting of the train.

The man who was the principal actor in the strange incidents that we have recorded was a famous detective.

His real name was Alfred Burgess, but owing to his miraculous personal strength and the number of hair-breadth escapes through which he had passed, he was widely known among the criminal fraternity as Iron Burgess.

The sobriquet was no misnomer, for our hero was truly a man of iron.

Not only did he possess an iron frame, but an iron will, and he was known as a man to whom fear was a total stranger.

For some time previous to the events which introduce him to our readers, Al Burgess had been engaged in hunting down forgers and base-metal coiners; but the illicit whisky distillers in a Southern State had proceeded to such lengths and had grown so bold in murders that the Government had at length determined to send their Iron Detective down to that perilous region.

Several Government officers and detectives had been murdered in the mountain fastnesses where the revenue frauds were perpetrated, and many more had been wounded.

Matters had come to such a pass that Government officials refused to enter the district at all, and the time had arrived when a war of absolute extermination became necessary.

Iron Burgess was well known by reputation down among the lawless men who thus defied the Government, and there was no one man in all the United States of whom they had a greater fear than the famous detective.

The latter had sought to keep the fact of his assignment to the perilous job a secret, but some loud-mouthed clerk had given the fact away in a moment of boastfulness, and the assignment became a matter of public notoriety.

The detective was just starting upon his journey South when the startling incident occurred with which we open our narrative.

The almost tragedy opened to our hero the fact that the villains had their emissaries near the Government, and that they had set out in advance to save themselves.

CHAPTER II.

THE men whose hands were guilty of so many deeds of violence would not hesitate to add one more to their list.

They could not afford to fail at their first attempt.

The criminals had shown their hands and had failed, and the wonderful man was on his guard.

Al Burgess could have run the woman down right then and there, but he did not wish to do so.

In those few brief moments following the excitement of the shot, and before he had moved out of his tracks, he had reasoned from what source the attempt had come.

The woman had confederates.

The arrest of one would not avail; he must arrest all of them.

In order to do that he must know the woman, and that one must not know that she was known.

The villains were down to a desperate point.

The person who would accept the mission to down Iron Burgess was prepared to die before he or she would give away a confederate.

Again, had the detective given himself away by an immediate arrest of the woman, he would

have damaged his ultimate chances down among the bands of Government robbers.

Strangely enough, the detective did not take much stock in the woman part of the story.

Again, he did not take much stock in the blue eyes and blonde hair, simply because he had concluded that the man who had cried out, "It's a woman!" was acting a part.

In fact, the detective made up his mind to look for the assailant in a person directly opposite in appearance to the description furnished by the volunteer witness.

The train started, and the detective passed through the cars.

He was in search of a face that would afford a clew, and it was a remarkable fact that it was only the faces of the male passengers that he scanned.

He passed from car to oar, and saw no face that called for closer examination.

The detective was prepared to return to Washington from the first station, in case he did not find his man.

At length Burgess started to pass into the parlor-car.

While crossing from one platform to another, he caught sight of a pale, agitated face.

He had found his man.

He would not return to Washington, but would remain on the train.

The detective had only caught a passing glimpse of the face of the passenger, but that one passing glance was sufficient.

He did not seize the man, nor stare at him, nor remain on the platform to watch him, but passed right along and entered the car ahead and seated himself.

Twenty minutes passed, and the car-door opened.

The man who had been standing on the platform entered and took a seat.

He seated himself directly opposite one of the train-lamps, and his features were plainly revealed.

A studied look confirmed the detective.

The man was not over thirty years of age.

He was a handsome-looking man, and evidently a daring fellow.

The detective intended going as far as New York.

When the conductor came round, he learned that the man he was piping was also bound for New York.

"I'll have plenty of time to work him down," was the detective's mental conclusion upon learning the man's destination.

Just ahead of the detective sat two ladies.

Both were veiled, but from their general outlines Burgess decided that one was an elderly lady accompanied by a younger companion.

The detective fell off after awhile into a light doze.

As often occurs, though but asleep for a few seconds, he had a long dream.

The dream was associated with the event that had so recently occurred.

He thought himself pursued by a fiend who was burning to destroy him.

The fiend appeared to be a woman in black robes, with blonde hair and lovely deep-blue eyes.

With a start he awoke just as this fair fiend in his dream was about to slay him.

The detective glanced over toward the young man.

He had fallen asleep.

Perfect stillness reigned in the car.

All conversation had ceased, and the passengers appeared to have all dropped off into the arms of Morpheus.

The Iron Detective was settling down for another moment's sleep, when he encountered a strange surprise.

CHAPTER III.

As most of our readers know who have traveled much, parlor-cars are profusely provided with elegant mirrors.

The detective chanced to glance into one of these mirrors, and, with a cold chill curdling at his heart, he saw reflected the image of the fiend with the blonde hair and blue eyes who in his dream had appeared to him.

The reflection also answered to a line the description of the woman the eye-witness of the attempted shooting had furnished.

The original of the image was the younger of the two veiled ladies who were sitting just in advance of him.

She had removed her veil, and her fair face was plainly reflected in the glass.

The Iron Detective was all at sea.

One fact was established.

The eye-witness was not a confederate, and he had furnished a true and accurate description of the person.

The would-be criminal was not a man, after all, but a fair and beautiful woman.

The point the detective wished to establish was a connection between the young man whom he had hit upon and the lovely girl who so fatally answered the description.

Burgess pretended to fall off asleep.

He was keenly watching, however.

He expected to see some exchange of glances that would establish a recognition between the girl and the man.

The train thundered on its way, and no such recognition occurred.

The detective went out upon the platform.

He had resolved upon a startling test.

A few moments and he re-entered the car, presenting precisely the same personal appearance as when he had first stepped aboard the train.

There were not many passengers in the car, and everything favored the test he was about to make.

Having changed his appearance, the detective secured a seat, so that his own image would be reflected in the same mirror in which he had seen the fair girl's face.

He skillfully managed to have his face reflected at a moment when the girl's eyes were closed.

When she opened them, the first object that met her gaze was the bearded face of the detective.

The latter was watching to see what effect the sudden discovery would have.

The effect was striking and startling enough to satisfy him.

A convulsion passed over the girl's face, a wild look of terror came to her lovely blue eyes, and her lips moved as though she were about to scream, but by a wonderful effort she suppressed the ready cry.

Irresistibly, though, her head was drawn around, and she looked toward the detective.

The dark-gray eyes of the officer and the deep blue eyes of the lovely woman met.

Terrible thought! had not the purpose of the owner of those blue eyes been foiled, the gray ones would at that moment have been blind to this world.

There was no chance for further comment at that time.

The singular incident was succeeded by a fearful tragedy.

It was a clear moonlight night.

The train had been thundering along at a fearful speed, but suddenly there came a rumbling, followed by crash after crash, and all was a whir and din.

The next thing the detective knew he was struggling in water, and wild cries and shrieks of terror and agony filled his ears.

The car was off the bridge, had plunged into the stream, and was rapidly filling with water.

All the lamps in the car had been smashed and extinguished save one, and the remaining light was right over the seat where the blue-eyed woman had sat.

One glance, and the detective saw that fair face.

Its wondrous beauty remained, even though the lovely features were convulsed with terror.

Death had overtaken the beautiful girl.

Death, with a chilly, gurgling sound, was rushing in upon the doomed people in that fated car.

All the incidents we have recorded, and those that follow, occurred in a few brief seconds.

Iron Burgess saw revenge held to his grasp.

He could save himself, and yet linger long enough to witness the fearful struggle of the girl who had banded herself with his foes.

Al Burgess was not the man to take his revenge in such a manner.

He plunged through the water as the girl's head was sinking beneath it.

Those lovely blue eyes were glaring at him.

There was a look of mute appeal in them.

Were her mouth free from the chill waters her lips would have uttered:

"Save me!"

The brave man did not wait for that appeal.

A moment and his strong arm had encircled the waist of the drowning girl.

He was determined that his act of mercy should not be only half performed.

He seized the elderly lady and bid her clasp him about the neck.

With the one clasped about him, and his own arm clasped about the delicate form of the other, the detective made his way toward the open door of the car.

There was about a foot of space between the surface of the water and the top of the door.

The latter opened inward, fortunately, and had been forced open by the water.

A moment and the detective was outside, and a few moments later he had both women on the top of the car.

Assistance had arrived, and in due time the detective had succeeded in landing both the females on the bank of the creek.

A scene of fearful excitement prevailed on every side.

Shrieks and cries of anguish and terror still rent the air.

The detective was springing back toward the wreck to aid others.

Suddenly a pair of fair arms, dripping with water, were clasped around his neck.

A pair of blue eyes, from which tears of gratitude were streaming, beamed upon him through a flood of tears, and a sweet choked voice murmured:

"Strange, strange fate! You—you have saved my life!"

CHAPTER IV.

The detective had no time to stop and listen to thanks.

His skill and strength were required at that fearful moment to assist in the rescue of others.

He disengaged himself from the clasp of the fair girl, and dashed down the bank of the stream.

The detective's efforts were almost superhuman, and a number of drowning passengers were saved from a watery grave through his cool daring.

It was morning when a relief train came and carried the passengers to Philadelphia.

The detective saw nothing of the girl he had saved until just as he was stepping on the car at Camden, at that time the terminus of the road from New York to Philadelphia.

Just as our hero was stepping on the train, he approached a gentleman and lady who were standing near one of the columns that supported the roof of the depot.

The detective recognized the two persons at a glance.

One was the man whom he had first suspected as the assassin; the other was the lady who so accurately answered the description of the man in the depot at Washington.

Burgess determined to overhear what passed between them.

He had changed his appearance so as to avoid any possible recognition of himself.

The man and woman spoke but a moment together after his discovery of them.

The woman remarked in a low voice:

"The man we would have slain saved my life."

Here was an absolute confession of the attempt on his life.

Our hero lost the man's answer, but distinguished from the expression of his face that it was a fierce and angry one.

Immediately after the little incident described, the two boarded the train.

They did not sit together nor look toward each other.

During the passage to New York the detective watched them closely, to observe if any sign of recognition passed between them.

They were as strangers to each other during the whole journey.

From the first moment that Alfred Burgess had glanced at the fair woman, it had run through his mind that her face was familiar to him.

At length a pleasant memory swept over his mind.

He was carried back to his boyhood.

Up in a mountain village of East Tennessee he had passed the early years of his life, and he remembered a fair-haired little girl, the daughter of a neighbor.

She was a beautiful child, as recalled to his memory, and he recognized the lovely child in the beautiful woman.

When the train reached Jersey City, the detective was on the lay to observe whether the two persons he had under surveillance passed away in company.

No sign of recognition passed between them.

The two females took a regular hotel coach, and the man went away afoot.

The detective made his way to the same hotel the two women had evidently chosen.

After dinner the detective sauntered downtown, and spent a few hours with some of his former friends among the New York force.

It was after midnight when he returned to the hotel.

He had just passed into his room, when he heard a light step along the hall.

A moment later he saw a slip of paper being forced under his door.

The detective leaped forward, opened the door, and dashing out into the hall, saw a female figure disappearing around the corner into one of the side halls.

One glance was sufficient.

It was not necessary for him to see the face. He recognized the form of the girl whose life he had saved.

Burgess returned to the room and picked up the note.

It read as follows:

"Do not sleep to-night; remain on guard.

"A Friend."

There was no other signature.

The detective read and reread the note.

"Well," he muttered, "this is strange! That girl attempted to murder me a few hours ago, and now she is acting as my guardian angel."

Again the detective thought, when a change came o'er the spirit of his dream.

The idea came to him that the letter may have been only a decoy to throw him off his guard.

The latter idea took such possession of him that he determined to retire and pay no attention to the note at all.

He threw himself upon his bed, and was soon fast asleep.

Before retiring, the detective had extinguished his gas, and the room was in total darkness.

How long he had slept he never knew, but he was suddenly awakened with a dim consciousness that he was not alone in the room.

The detective opened his eyes, and, like all men trained to danger, in an instant was in full possession of his keenest senses.

Within three feet of the bed was a human form.

It was the form of a woman.

A dark-lantern was set on a stand in the room.

The figure stood between the ray of light flashed from the lantern and a small mirror over a bureau in the room.

Iron Burgess chanced to glance toward the mirror, and a cold chill went through his heart.

There, plainly revealed in that tell-tale mirror, were the handsome features of the female fiend.

Her eyes glared wildly, like one on some desperate mission in the darkness.

The detective was perfectly motionless as the beautiful woman approached the bed and bent over him.

His eyes were partly closed, but through one of them he could watch every motion of the fair murderess.

It was a terrible moment.

An instant passed, and the moment came when it was necessary for the threatened man to act.

CHAPTER V.

The detective suddenly leaped up in the bed.

The woman gave a scream and started for the door that had remained open.

In her hurry she forgot to take her lamp, and after she had fled, the dark-lantern still remained upon the table, its dull light gleaming like a glow-worm.

The detective had locked his door, and it was opened by a false key.

The bolt also had been slid, and that to him was a mystery.

In fact, the whole affair was a mystery.

The detective left his room late in the morning, and after his breakfast set about seeking an interview with the strangely acting girl.

Going down to the office, he inquired about the parties who had occupied the rooms, and learned that they had settled their bill and gone away in a private coach an hour before daylight.

Burgess remained in New York a week, but during that time he neither saw nor heard anything of the people who had assailed him in such a mysterious manner.

At the end of the week he started for the South to begin the real service on which he was bound.

It was a cold, stormy night that a horseman stopped at a mountain tavern in East Tennessee.

The tavern was situated right in the midst of the region where the illicit distillers were supposed to be located.

The horseman had ridden along the road in a driving rain, and at the moment he stopped at the tavern he was bespattered with mud and drenched to the skin.

Fastening his horse to the hitching-post, the stranger walked to the tavern-door, opened it, and stalked boldly into the room.

There were five men in the place.

They looked like ordinary well-to-do farmers, save that to a keen observer they had the appearance of determined, resolute men.

"Who is the host here?" asked the stranger.

The men had all been gazing at him in a critical manner, and one of them said:

"The hotel-keeper is not in at present, stranger."

"Anybody to look after my horse?"

"I guess not."

"Can I get a lantern?"

"You'll find one behind the bar there, I reckon."

The stranger found the lantern, and going out into the storm, led his horse around to the miserable old stable at the rear and side of the tavern.

The moment the stranger had gone out to attend to his horse the men assembled in the bar-room gazed in one another's faces a moment without speaking a word.

At length the silence was broken by one of the men, who said:

"Who's he?"

"Well, it's hard to place him."

"A Government agent?"

"He ain't no friend, you can just bet your bottom dollar; and, what's more, he's a native of these parts. I've seed his face afore, but I can't just place him."

The men continued discussing the stranger, when at length he cut off the conversation concerning himself by entering the bar-room.

"Can a man get a good, square, pure drink around here?" he asked.

"Plenty of water out in the well there, stranger," answered one of the men.

"Water, eh? Well, I supposed where there was so much whisky manufactured a man might get something a little more tart than water."

At the allusion to the manufacture of whisky the men all gave a sudden start, and one of them asked, in a fierce tone:

"Who told you, stranger, that whisky was manufactured around here?"

The stranger laughed in a hearty manner, and answered:

"Playing 'possum, eh? Well, now, look here, friend, I don't take that sort of innocence."

"Look here, stranger, it's a rough night, and it wouldn't be a sort of fair to toss a man out in the storm, but if you are not more civil, the chances are you'll go."

"Who would put me out? You?" asked the stranger, in a defiant tone.

The man who had spoken in such a threatening manner was a tall, raw-boned chap of eight-and-twenty. Jasper Knight was known as one of the strongest men in Eastern Tennessee.

As a wrestler and boxer he had never met his equal.

"I reckon you're a stranger round these parts?" said Jasper Knight, in a peculiar tone.

"I rather think a man's in luck who always is a stranger to these parts, for I'll be hanged if I ever struck for a night's rest among a surlier lot of folks in all my life."

A wicked gleam came in the dead gray eyes of Jasper Knight as he said:

"I say, stranger, it might be better for you if you got on to the next town; I'll bring your horse around if you say so."

"Bring my horse around, and I'll toss you over him."

"What!" exclaimed Jasper Knight, in amazement.

"You heard what I said; bring my horse around to the door, and I'll toss you over him."

"I'll be hanged if I don't!" exclaimed Jasper Knight, as he left the bar-room with the light of a strange purpose in his eyes.

A few moments passed, and the sound of a horse's feet was heard in the soft mud outside.

Jasper Knight had brought the horse around, and the stranger stood by with a smile on his face and a sinister gleam in his eyes.

All eyes were turned toward the door as Jasper Knight stalked in and said:

"There's yer horse by the door, stranger."

CHAPTER VI.

Iron Burgess eyed the young giant before him, and in a cool tone asked:

"How will you take it, Mister Man?"

"Take what, you smooth-tongued jackanapes?"

"Your leap over my horse," was the cool reply.

"Look here, stranger," said Knight, between his clinched teeth, when he had recovered sufficiently from his surprise to speak at all.

"I am looking at you," said Burgess, coolly, while smiling in the most aggravating manner.

"Do you mean all you're sayin'?"

"I do."

"And you will try to toss me over your horse?"

"I will toss you over my horse."

At that moment Iron Burgess chanced to glance toward the door opening from the bar-room.

He saw that it was partly opened, and a human face was revealed.

It was a pale, ghostly, excited face.

A fair hand was thrust through the door and beckoned for him to draw near.

"My God!" was his mental exclamation.

At that instant he realized fully his terrible peril.

He had adopted a suitable disguise when starting for the dangerous region where he found himself, and his disguise had been penetrated.

Recognition to him was sure death.

He pretended not to see the beckoning hand, and turned his attention to Knight.

"Are you ready, my friend?" he asked.

"By gol, stranger, I sort of like you, and don't want you to go it blind. There ain't no man in this country can handle me."

"I'm going to toss you over my horse, anyhow. You brought him around here, and I told you if you did you should go over him."

"Well, get to work, stranger. I see you're in earnest; and if every bone in your body is broke, it's your own doings."

The detective commenced throwing aside his coat and waistcoat in the most deliberate manner.

The men assembled around stood aghast at his coolness and bravado.

"Well, as you're getting ready for the wrestle, stranger, I reckon I'll peel, too."

Both men were soon stripped.

Lights were placed against the window, and the men walked out on the tumble-down piazza.

It was agreed that one of the party should hold the horse in position for the novel experiment.

Iron Burgess sprung forward and clasped his giant antagonist in his arms.

A terrific struggle followed.

It did not last long, however, as suddenly, to the surprise and amazement of all hands, Jasper Knight was seen to go flying clear over the stranger's horse.

A cry of astonishment greeted this extraordinary performace.

Jasper Knight fell with a thud on a soft bank.

In a moment he was upon his feet, and coming around to where the detective stood, he said:

"We'll try it over again."

"Oh! you want to go over again, eh?" laughed Burgess. "Well, you shall be gratified; come along."

The two men clinched again, when Knight whispered in our hero's ear:

"You're too much for me, stranger."

"I am."

"Do you want to make a friend?"

"I do."

"Let me toss you over the horse."

"Agreed," answered Burgess.

The affair had terminated in a far different manner from what the detective had anticipated.

He had expected to see Knight come flying at him in anger, and was glad at the turn the affair had taken.

The two powerful men wrestled furiously.

One moment the detective was raised half over the horse, and the next moment Jasper Knight was raised half over.

The excitement became intense.

The men gathered around had expected to see Jasper make a second leap over the animal, but at length encountered a second surprise when the detective went flying clean over.

Iron Burgess came around from the other side of the horse, and said:

"We'll try it over."

"Aha! you want to go over again?" said Jasper, imitating the tone our hero had used.

"Yes; I want to go over again."

There was a strange significance in the detective's tone.

Jasper felt that his man meant business again.

The moment they were clinched, Knight whispered:

"Give me the rubber."

"I can't."

"You will make me an enemy."

"Can't help it."

"Jasper Knight is a true friend."

"I may not need a friend."

"If you ever do, you'll never regret giving me the fall."

The detective had laid all his plans for just the result that had transpired.

He knew that it would be a great thing for Knight to win the fall.

He knew also that he could afford to lose it, having succeeded in once throwing a man so greatly his superior physically.

The detective made it a desperate struggle, and plainly let his antagonist see that it was only to gratify him that the fall was lost.

At length Burgess made a second trip over the horse.

The battle was concluded.

As Burgess came around after the second fall, Knight extended his hand, and in a cordial manner exclaimed:

"Put it there, stranger; you're a good 'un, and the only man in this state who could give Jasper Knight such a tussle."

All hands returned to the bar-room, and the usual conviviality followed the strange combat.

In the midst of the common good feelings another man joined the party.

The latter was a surly, ugly-looking man.

He was the boss whisky distiller of the region hereabouts.

He had made heaps of money, as the saying goes, and was a sort of young king among the mountain people.

It was evident from the very start that James Snedicon had conceived a deep prejudice against the stranger.

The man, having about all his life engaged in contraband business, was readily suspicious of every one with whom he came in contact.

He was known as a desperate man.

His face was scarred all over from personal encounters and scrapes, and he was always ready to inaugurate a quarrel with any one.

Several times he said insulting things to the detective, but the latter paid no attention to the remarks.

The fact was, the time had not come for Burgess to quarrel with Snedicon, but the detective was prepared to act according to the demands of the moment when it did come.

The incident that worried the detective most was the fact that he had been recognized by the girl whom he heard called Belle, and whom he surmised was the niece of the proprietor of the hostelry.

The hour arrived when he demanded to be shown to his room.

He had been but a few moments in the latter when there came a gentle rap at his door.

The detective opened his door, and, like a vision of loveliness, Belle Granger glided into the room and closed the door behind her.

"I have penetrated your disguise," said the girl.

"You must have known me and have met me before to have recognized me now?"

"You are trying to throw me off, but it will not do; and now listen; you must get away from here with the dawn."

"Well, that is strange. I am not a criminal, and this is a free country, I reckon."

"You know what I mean."

"What do you mean?"

"One word from me, and your life would not be safe five minutes."

"I'd like to know how that can be?"

"The men up here are a desperate lot; they are all dangerous when it comes to a Government agent."

"Hist! young lady, speak low."

"I will speak low; but remember, you must not remain around here one hour after daylight."

CHAPTER VII.

THE detective made no reply to the fair girl's remark.

In fact, his mind was running back on the strange and startling incidents that had first called that lovely face to his attention.

At length Belle said:

"I know what your business is, and you will not live an hour after your real business is known."

"It will not be known unless you tell," said the detective.

"I would die before I would betray you," exclaimed the beautiful girl, her face becoming illumined with a grand enthusiasm.

"You would not betray me?" said the detective, interrogatively.

"Never. Do you suppose I could ever forget the terrible incidents of that night of peril some weeks ago?"

"Do you mean the railroad wreck?"

"Yes; you saved my life and the life of my aunt."

"Is your aunt the wife of the man who keeps this tavern?"

"Yes."

The detective was thoughtful a moment, but at length he said:

"You are a strange girl."

"I am an unhappy girl."

"Who was the young man who was on the train with you that night?"

A deathly pallor overspread Belle Granger's face.

"What young man?" she asked.

"You say you have recognized me?"

"I have."

"Then you must know that I can not be deceived. I had you and that young man under surveillance from the moment you left Washington."

"And you have come here to run him down?"

"No; I have no reason to run him down."

"You are not revengeful, then?"

"If I had been revengeful, you would never have reached this place," said Burgess, gazing upon the fair girl in a stern manner.

"You would have run me down?"

"No; I would have arrested you."

"What for?"

"Murder."

The girl gazed at the detective in a dazed sort of manner, and murmured:

"Arrested me for murder?"

"Yes, poor girl; I know all."

"If you knew all, you would not talk of arresting me."

The girl spoke in such a simple and truthful manner that the detective was completely nonplused.

At length he said:

"We may be talking at cross purposes."

"I fear we are."

"Shall we come right down to plain talk?"

"Please do."

"Then know that I am fully aware that it was you who fired that pistol at me in the depot at Washington. It was you who attempted to shoot me. And I was fully possessed of this knowledge when I saved your life."

There was a strange expression upon Belle Granger's face as Iron Burgess made the revelation above recorded.

The detective watched the flitting of the various emotions across that strange girl's face.

The idea came to him that there must be some terrible mistake.

Not in her identity. He could not be deceived in that respect, and he began to suspect that, after all, that fair girl was not guilty.

He had not seen her fire the shot in Washington; and at the time she had visited his room in New York there was no proof that her intention was wicked.

Had she quickly denied having attempted his life, he would have been convinced that she was guilty.

Strange as it may appear, the very fact that she did not deny it led our hero to believe that she possibly might not be guilty.

Burgess had encountered strange experiences during his career, and he had known women associated with criminals to practice acts of the most heroic self-devotion.

"You do not deny having attempted my life?" said the detective.

"Can I not atone for the act? Am I not atoning now by warning you of the danger that threatens you?"

The woman did not deny the detective's charge; she did not admit it, but was implying and evading.

The detective's suspicion of her innocence increased.

At this moment there came a rap at the door.

Belle Granger displayed the utmost terror.

"Heavens!" she exclaimed. "If I am found here I am ruined!"

"Step within that closet," said Burgess, who was always cool in a moment of critical emergency.

The girl obeyed. She appeared to realize that with a man like Burgess her honor was safe.

The detective opened the door of his room, when, to his astonishment and dismay, Jasper Knight stalked in and seated himself upon a chair as though he had come to stay.

Iron Burgess could not refuse to admit the man, and yet he was annoyed at receiving the visit.

"What do you want?" he asked, sharply.

"I've come to have a talk with you, stranger."

"Can't you defer your talk until morning?"

"I wish to ask you a few questions."

"I am not answering questions just now."

"You are an independent man."

"I am."

"Too independent not to have some purpose around here."

"I do not understand you."

"You want me to come down to plain talk?"

"Yes."

"Well, you act like a man who came around here prepared to meet danger."

"I am always prepared to take care of myself."

The detective fixed a bold glance on Knight, and spoke in a very decided tone.

"You did me a favor, mister?"

"I do not remember."

"You let me toss you over the horse."

"That was a small favor."

"A big one to me, simply because had I gone over that horse my influence around these diggings would have been busted."

"All right; some day you may get square with me."

"I have come to get square now."

"Well, out with your notes."

"There be rumors round here about you."

"What are the rumors concerning me?"

"Do you want a feller to speak right out?"

"Yes."

"They say you are a Government agent."

"What do you say?"

"Nothing."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Own up."

"Own up to what?"

"That you are a Government agent."

"Own up to what is not true?"

"Oh! I knew you would deny it."

"Why did you come to question me, then?"

"I thought myself a friend."

"Well, as a friend, what have you got to say?"

"All I've got to say is that if you are an agent you had better git."

"Where?"

"Anywhere, so long as you leave these parts."

"Who is the man who first spoke out?"

"Well, Jim Snedicon was the first to open clear up, though others have sort of hinted."

"Well, then, the next time James Snedicon says that I am a Government agent, tell him for me—for me, mind you—that he is a liar."

"A message like that means fight."

"If worst comes to worst, you'll stand my best man?"

"I will."

"You can warrant fair play and an open field?"

"I can."

"All right; just give it to Snedicon as I told you."

Jasper Knight passed from the room.

When he had gone, Belle Granger stepped from the closet.

The girl clasped the detective's hand, and exclaimed:

"Oh, you must be warned!"

"Well, I am getting lots of warnings."

"The shadows of an awful doom are thickening over your head."

"Do not you turn a prophetess of evil omen."

"I owe you my life."

"I may owe you mine," said the detective in a strange tone.

"I have done my duty," said the girl; and she stepped toward the door.

"I can depend upon you?"

"In what respect?"

"My identity shall not be revealed."

"You can, on one condition."

"Name it."

"You may meet the young man who was on the car with me. Spare him."

"What is he to you?"

"He is my step brother."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"Unless I am compelled to cross that young man's path I will not."

"Thank you," said the girl; and she left the room.

Just at dawn upon the following day Jasper Knight aroused the detective.

Upon entering the room, Jasper said:

"You are in for it."

"With whom?"

"James Snedicon."

"You told him what I said?"

"Word for word."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing with his mouth, but a good deal with his eye."

"He will come for me?"

"Sure."

Burgess dressed himself without the tremor of a muscle, and descended to the breakfast-table.

At the conclusion of the meal he came out into the bar-room.

The first man he saw was Snedicon.

The latter approached and said:

"You sent me a message?"

"Well, yes, stranger, I believe I did send you a message," answered Burgess, in a drawling tone.

CHAPTER VIII.

THERE was a scowl upon Snedicon's face as he asked the question.

The detective's face was as mild as a June morning.

"Did you mean that message for me?" asked Snedicon.

"I meant it for any man who was going around making certain remarks about me."

Quick as lightning, Snedicon raised his hand and made a movement to slap the detective's face.

The next instant he measured his length upon the floor.

Iron Burgess had shot out his powerful arm, and the insulter fell.

Few men of the great physique and strength of Iron Burgess possessed his wonderful quickness of eye and hand, and his complete control of himself in moments of danger enabled him to decide and act almost simultaneously.

Seeing that his antagonist was disabled, Burgess quietly lighted a cigar, and walking out upon the piazza, seated himself and smoked as unconcernedly as though he had just kicked a cat.

Having acquitted himself in such a valiant manner, the detective set about throwing off suspicion.

He returned into the bar-room, and addressing the landlord, said:

"I suppose it's about time for me to open my head as to my business around here."

"It's your own affair, stranger."

"You remember the Light family?"

"I do."

"There are some members of that family living around here yet, are there not?"

"I reckon not, stranger."

"No relative?"

"I think not."

"There must be; and I want to hunt the person up, whoever it may be."

"May I ask you why you want to find one of the family?"

"Certainly; I am from California."

"Ah! you're from out that way, eh?"

"I am."

"By George! I thought you were from some such lively sort of place; for, by ginger! you've made yourself lively enough around here for so short a stay.

"Jim Light died in California, and left quite a sum in cash."

"Is that so?"

"The next of kin is to get the money, and I'm up this way to find that next of kin."

There was truth in the detective's statement.

A Washington lawyer had heard of his assignment down in those parts, and had employed him to hunt up a relative of the dead Jim Light, who had died in San Francisco, leaving an estate, as the detective had stated.

The detective had made his inquiries openly, and had been overheard by the usual lot of loungers that are to be seen hanging around a country tavern.

"Stranger," said the landlord, "I'm glad you've made up your mind to speak out."

"I don't understand you."

"Well, you know it has been rumored that you were a Government agent."

"Well, I suppose you can take care of yourselves as well as the agents?"

"We've generally managed to take good care of the agents," spoke up one of the loungers.

"You have, eh?"

"You bet; and if the Government were payin' pensions to the families of those fellows, the sum they'd hev to pay out would come to more than all the revenue they would get, even if they collected every cent."

"Is that so?"

"That's so, stranger—you bet."

"Uncle Sam may send the right man down here some day, who will get the grip on you chaps," remarked Burgess, as he went upstairs to his room.

He had not been long in his room, after the occurrence detailed at the close of our previous chapter, when he was disturbed by a knock at his door.

"Who's there?"

"A messenger," came the answer.

"All right; come in."

The door opened, and a man whom Burgess had never before seen crossed the threshold.

"I am a friend of Mr. Snedicon."

"Ah!" was all the detective deigned to answer.

"You may surmise my business."

"I am not a Yankee; I never make guesses."

"Can you refer me to a friend?"

"I am a stranger in these parts, but I presume I may call upon Mr. Jasper Knight to represent me."

"Then you do understand the purport of my business?"

"The mention of Mr. Snedicon's name would indicate it."

"You are prepared to render my friend proper satisfaction?"

"Mr. Knight will speak for me."

"I see you are well up in the requirements of the code."

Burgess made no reply, and the man withdrew.

Half an hour later Jasper Knight knocked at our hero's door.

"It's done," was his salutation.

"Well, when does it take place?"

"To-night."

"What weapons?"

"Pistols."

Strangely enough, the challenger had named midnight as the hour for the combat to come off.

Jasper took his departure, promising to be on hand in time to conduct our hero to the place of meeting.

The moment the detective was left alone a stern look settled upon his face.

A suspicion of the most terrible character had crossed his mind.

The duel might only be a little mask for the perpetration of a cold-blooded murder.

Our hero made up his mind not to be caught in any trap.

It was still early in the day, and he left his room, announcing that he would not be back to dinner.

He had seen Jasper Knight go off in a certain direction, and had made up his mind to follow him.

The moment Burgess got far enough away from the tavern he worked a complete change in his personal appearance.

He succeeded in transforming himself into a perfect specimen, in appearance, of a regular mountaineer.

The detective kept upon his way until he came to a place where the moss was all worn off a side wall.

The wearing off of the moss was suggestive.

A close examination satisfied him that men had been clambering up that wall.

It was a mystery to our hero how the men managed to clamber up that solid wall of rock.

There was a reason for it, however, as it would serve best to hide the direct path to the place of illicit operations.

The detective did not attempt to clamber up that wall.

His first move was to take some accurate observations.

It was a sort of gulch in which he found himself.

High walls of rock rose on either side of him.

A careful examination revealed a pathway up the opposite rock.

Burgess stole up, and moving along the ledge, hid himself in the bushes that grew along the extreme verge.

He had not been concealed many minutes when he heard voices.

The voices sounded nearer and nearer, and in a few moments he heard steps along the hard mountain road.

"They are coming," he muttered.

His words proved true.

The steps came nearer and nearer, and in a few moments three men came moving along the road.

They halted opposite the place where the moss was worn off the rock.

Iron Burgess had not had the men under observation five minutes before he learned the absolute wisdom of his precaution.

The men were talking among themselves.

They had not the least idea of listeners in that out-of-the-way place, and they talked quite loudly and quite freely.

"I reckon Uncle Sam will get sick of this business and let us alone after a bit."

"It's more likely he'll be sending down a detachment of the regular army," remarked another.

"I'd rather he'd send down a whole regiment of soldiers than those infernal detectives," spoke up a third.

"Hang it! if we only lay out a few more of them, the fellers will not dare to come down."

"I reckon we have planted enough already to scare 'em off, if they were to be scared."

"This last chap that's come down among us is an ugly customer," remarked one of the men in continuation of the conversation as detailed above.

Burgess heard this allusion to "this last chap," and knew well enough to whom the fellow referred.

"He's a deep one."

"You can just bet he is; and our business is in danger as long as he's above ground."

"There's a job up to fix this last fellow."

"Who's working it?"

"Jasper Knight."

"I fear that fellow more than any man who has been down this way."

"And so do I; and before we are done with him, some of us will go home."

"Can't help it; we are in for long chances, and if it's fate that some of us turn up our toes, it's all right, I suppose."

The conversation between the men continued for some time.

The men were evidently waiting for some one.

The object of their wait soon became apparent.

The detective overheard the rattle of wagon-wheels.

In a few moments an ordinary country hay-cart came rattling along the road.

The wagon was but partly filled with hay.

It was stopped opposite to where the men had been waiting.

Burgess laid low, and beheld a little of the gang's operations from his place of concealment.

The moment the wagon had been brought to a halt, one of the men produced a number of lengths of iron rods.

These he attached together, and the last one fastened on had a hook attached.

As soon as the lengths were all adjusted, the man reached over the ledge and commenced fishing around with it.

The object of the hook was speedily explained.

A rope-ladder was dragged from over the ledge, and one end of the ladder came tumbling down at the feet of the men.

At once the men commenced ascending the ladder.

One mystery was explained.

The detective saw how the moss had been worn away off the face of the rock, and learned also how the ascent to the top was made.

He had more to learn, however.

The hay was tossed from the wagon and piled up in a heap on the road.

The whole business was being opened up to him.

The men who had ascended to the top of the ledge soon appeared, rolling barrels to the verge.

The tackling for lowering the barrels was back from the cliff, and out of sight.

All hands were soon engaged lowering the barrels of whisky into the hay-cart.

A load was soon let down, the hay was piled over it, and the wagon drove away.

A short time only elapsed, when two more wagons came along, and the same operation was repeated.

The detective, from his place of concealment, saw one hundred barrels of the illicit liquor lowered, loaded, packed, and driven away.

Having done a day's work, the men came down from over the wall of rock.

The hooking arrangement was used, and the rope-ladder nicely stowed away on the ledge once more.

The man disconnected the lengths, and all hands went away.

"A good morning's work," muttered Burgess, as the men disappeared and he arose from his hiding-place.

The detective was satisfied that the location of the still was not far away.

His game now was to ascend that ledge opposite.

Coming down from his hiding-place, he walked along through the gulch.

He had an idea in his mind that he could manage to get up to the top of that ledge without troubling the rope-ladder.

CHAPTER IX.

IRON BURGESS knew that it was necessary for him to move without leaving any trace behind.

He walked along the gulch for over a mile, taking the bearings as he went.

At length he came to a point where the ledge sloped down near the road.

He turned from the road and retraced his steps along the ledge, and at length reached the point over which the whisky had been lowered.

Striking a line from the point named, he walked back a short distance, and soon came to a place where he saw piled, tier upon tier, over five hundred barrels of whisky.

Cautiously he moved along.

Like an Indian, he studied the trail, and soon came to the wildest-looking place he had ever beheld.

Before him rose an immense body—mountain, we may say—of solid rock.

The mountain of rock walled in an immense basin.

On the opposite side he saw a crevice opening into the solid wall of rock.

One thing was evident.

Nature had saved the moonshiners the trouble of building a distillery.

It did not seem possible that any living man, without some inkling of the truth, could ever have found that place.

Iron Burgess knew the spot.

In his boyhood he had once visited the place. He could not have started out and have gone straight to the place.

He knew, however, that such a spot existed, and the moment he stumbled upon it he recognized the wonder of his boyhood days.

The moment he came upon the place he remembered about the wonderful cave there in the solid rock, and at the same time appreciated how well the wild place was adapted to the use to which it had most undoubtedly been applied.

Stealthily he moved along, and had passed some distance away from the entrance to the basin.

He reached a spot where it was necessary for him to stoop down and crawl on his hands and knees through a narrow passage.

He had crawled about through, and had protruded his head on the further side, when, upon looking up, he saw himself confronted by a man.

The muzzle of a rifle was held within an inch of his head.

"Don't come any further, stranger," came the command.

"Oh, my! don't shoot!" moaned Burgess in a pitiful tone.

"What are you doing here?" asked the man who held the rifle.

"Nothing."

"Well, what do you want to do?"

"Go back, if you please," moaned Burgess.

The man smiled in an amused way, the answer was so natural, so simple, and, withal, so humorous.

The detective intended his answer to be natural and simple.

He was in a tight place, and it required nerve and cunning to get out again.

In the meantime, he had a chance to look at the face of the man who had halted him.

It was a good, brave, honest face.

"What brought you out to these parts?" asked the man.

"I belong around here," was the answer.

"Well, crawl out alongside me."

"I am afraid to."

"What are you afraid of?"

"That gun."

"You need not fear my rifle," said the man; and he withdrew the muzzle from such close proximity to our hero's head.

"Now come," he said.

The detective slowly crawled toward the man with the rifle.

He crawled until he was at the very feet of the man.

"Stand up and let's have a look at you," exclaimed the stranger.

Burgess suddenly leaped to his feet.

As he did so he grasped the man in a grip of iron.

The stranger was for the moment absolutely paralyzed with amazement.

Burgess wrenched the rifle from the man's grasp and then freed him.

"Don't move, my friend; take it easy. You are an honest man; and turn about, you know, is fair play."

The man stood mute.

"Now, then," said the detective, "just tell me what you were doing around here, and don't be afraid to tell the truth."

"I might as well be frank with you."

"That is what I want."

"I'm no moonshiner, so don't give yourself away if you are."

"If you are not a whisky man, why do I find you lurking in this vicinity, armed?"

"That is a private matter; I do not feel bound to answer that question."

"I believe you to be a square, honest man," said the detective.

"Thank you."

"You have been frank with me; I will be equally so with you. I am not a moonshiner."

"I am glad to hear you say so."

"I am on the track of those chaps," continued Burgess.

"You are a Government agent?"

"I am a Government detective."

"Did you ever know a man named Harry Ingersol?"

"I knew him well; he died down this way but a few months ago."

"My name is Tom Ingersol."

"A brother?"

"Yes."

"On the force?"

"No."

"I think I can guess your business around here."

"I think so."

"It's bad business, Tom Ingersol, and I was your brother's close friend; he and I had been in many a tight place together."

"What is your name?"

"Alfred Burgess."

"What! the man they call the Iron Detective?"

"The same."

"Indeed you were my brother's friend."

"I was; and yet I tell you that you are on business—this vendetta business—that don't pay in the long run; and, besides, you make yourself as guilty as your brother's assassins."

"What is your game?"

"I'll bring every one engaged in these parts in the business to justice; and every murder that has been committed shall be investigated, and every murderer punished."

"I'd like to join you in this business."

"You can, on one condition."

"You would ask me not to take vengeance in my own hands?"

"Exactly."

"I'll promise."

"That is enough; an Ingersol's word is sufficient for me. And now let me ask you a question."

"Ten, if you wish."

"Are you known around here?"

"I am not."

"Would you mind masquerading under another name for a few days?"

"Shouldn't like to, but I will if we can make a point."

"We can."

"All right; you play captain, and I'll follow your commands."

Burgess related all that had occurred to him since his arrival on the mountains.

When he came to the duel part of the narrative, Ingersol exclaimed:

"It's a trick."

"That's my idea."

"Did you ever hear how they got the best of my brother?"

"Never."

"By the duel trick."

"I've been satisfied from the start that it was a conspiracy."

"Nothing else."

"We can defeat them."

"We must."

"You must assume the name of Tom Light."

"I'll do it."

"You must come down to the tavern to see me early this evening."

"I'll be on hand."

"You can come in and assume a swaggering tone and manner, and announce that you have heard there was a man around that way looking for Tom Light."

"You can depend upon me; and, to start fair, let me tell you that I am a detective, and well up in the business."

"That's good. You can get yourself up for this side show?"

"I can."

"You must denounce all the moonshiners when I let on to you about the duel."

"I begin to see your game; it will bring on a fight, however."

"We will have a chance in an open fight, but no chance against secret assassins."

"All right; you are laying matters to suit me to a dot."

"You must tell me right out and out that you have heard a game was on foot to murder me, under the suspicion that I am a Government agent."

Having agreed upon their plans for the night, Burgess and Tom Ingersol determined to go in company and explore the cavern where the illicit stills were situated.

The two men crawled along over the jagged rocks.

Burgess was looking for an entrance to the cavern that he had known when a boy.

After an exhausting climb, they came upon the entrance they had been seeking for.

The two men moved forward very slowly and cautiously.

At length they came upon a natural gallery overlooking a scene that was strangely grotesque.

A dozen men in red shirts were at work under the glare of a number of lights.

The detective calmly sat down and surveyed the scene.

He was fixing in his mind the faces of every man at work, so that at the proper time he could put his hand on each one of them and swear positively to every man.

A great many points were picked up, and the two men retired to prepare for the strategy of the night.

All the details of his plan were arranged with Tom Ingersol, and Burgess shed his disguise and returned to the tavern.

But a few of the usual loungers were around.

It was late in the afternoon; and after partaking of a meal that the proprietor prepared for him, the detective lighted a pipe and walked over to a pleasant grove of trees back of the house.

He had not been seated there long before he was disturbed by overhearing voices in loud conversation.

He moved nearer toward the point where the conversation was in progress.

Before him stood the mysterious young man whom he had seen on the trip from Washington when so many stirring events occurred.

Talking with the young man was the fair girl who he had reason to believe had attempted his life, and who had since, in such a strange manner, as he had reason to believe, proved his friend.

Burgess hid himself close from observation, and listened.

At once he discovered that he was the subject of conversation between the man and girl.

"I have penetrated that man's disguise, I tell you, and he is Burgess, the Iron Detective."

"I tell you that you are mistaken."

"Bah! one could tell with half an eye that the man is disguised, and I tell you he is doomed."

The girl stepped forward, and laying her hand on the young man's arm, said in a firm tone, while she was evidently laboring under repressed excitement:

"I tell you that if you are a party to this plot, you are doomed."

"Listen to me, sister; a strange suspicion has crossed my mind."

"You are always indulging in strange suspicions."

"Did you ever see this man Burgess previous to that little incident that happened in the Washington depot?"

"You know I never did."

"And yet it strikes me that your sudden interest in him is very strange."

"Is it interest in a victim, when a woman seeks to save her brother from becoming a criminal?"

"There is something in that, I will admit; but you must remember that the man is my deadly foe, and unless he is got out of the way I am a ruined man; every dollar I have in the world is invested in this business."

"I will warn him of his danger."

"If you dare!" cried the man, with flashing eyes.

"You know I dare a great deal for a helpless woman."

"You have heard what I say. Warn that man if you dare."

At that moment Burgess stepped from his concealment and confronted the couple.

The girl uttered a cry of terror; the man glared fiercely at Burgess as the latter said, in even tones:

"It will not be necessary for the young lady to dare your threats. I am already warned."

The young man was a fiery chap, and, with a face white with anger, he made a movement as though to draw a weapon.

"Hold on, my young friend. Remember, you missed once."

"Ah! Then you do not deny that you are Burgess the detective?"

"It may be so."

"I have a good notion to lay you out."

"Don't try it, as I promised this young lady here that I would not harm you unless I was compelled to do so."

"You have placed me under an obligation—not in sparing my life, but in obeying a request from that lady."

"And from what I have overheard, you propose repaying the obligation by permitting me to be caught in a trap."

"You can save your life."

"How?"

"By leaving these parts at once."

"——— came down here with a purpose, young man."

"I am not concerned in it, then?"

"You are."

"How?"

"I'll tell you: by threatening to reveal my identity."

"I am in honor bound to do so."

"If any harm befalls me, you'll hang."

The young man stared in amazement.

"A full description of your person, name, habits, and associations are in the hands of men who will hold you to an account for any evil that befalls me. I've had you down better than any man in the business, and only one thing will save you from harm."

"What is that one thing?"

"A promise not to reveal who I am for three days; at the end of that time you can speak."

CHAPTER X.

THE young man took a moment to consider, and then said:

"I will promise not to betray you."

"Remember, it is not on my own account that I exact this promise. I can take good care of myself."

With a glance at the fair girl, who had stood mute during the foregoing conversation, the detective walked away.

Late the same afternoon following the incidents narrated, Burgess was seated in the common room of the tavern.

Jasper Knight was present, and a number of men whom our hero recognized as having seen among the red-shirted gnomes working in the cavern distillery.

Suddenly the monotony of country tavern life was broken by a clatter of horse's feet.

A horseman was seen dashing down the road toward the tavern.

He was a wild and reckless rider, and withal a wild and most grotesque-looking individual as he arrived in front of the hostelry and dismounted.

Burgess was seated near the door as the man dashed into the bar-room.

The fellow did not notice him, but went straight to the bar and called for a glass of whisky.

After drinking off his whisky, in a rough and unceremonious manner he asked:

"Got a stranger staying here with you?"

"Yes, I have."

"Well, trot him out."

"Why do you want me to trot him out?"

"Want ter see him."

Our hero was delighted.

He saw at once that he had secured an aid who was a perfect brick.

The tavern-keeper glanced over toward the detective, and inquired by his look:

"Shall I give you over to this wild fellow?"

Burgess interpreted the meaning of the glance, and nodded assent.

"So you want to see the guest who's stopping with me?"

"I reckon that's just what I came here for."

"There he sits."

The new-comer walked over toward our hero, and asked:

"Be you from Washington?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you looking for a chap called Tom Light?"

"I am."

The stranger reached forth his hand in a rough-and-ready sort of manner, exclaiming:

"Well, I'm your man."

"Are you Tom Light?"

"That's my name."

"Did you bring any proofs as to your identity?"

"Proofs of what?"

"Proofs that you are Tom Light."

The new-comer gazed at the detective in a dazed sort of way, and at length said:

"Didn't I say that was my name?"

"You did."

"And you want proof?"

"I think so."

"Well, here's the proof, stranger, and there's no going back on it, nuther."

As the man who claimed to be Tom Light spoke, he placed himself opposite our hero in an offensive attitude.

The detective simply remarked:

"It's a pretty tough country down this way, when a man has to fight for doing a man a favor."

"Are you lookin' for Tom Light to do him a favor?"

"I am."

"Now look here; you and I can't scratch each other nohow; my hand's up; give us yer hand, and I'll take a softer way of proving I'm the man I claim to be."

"That's the way to talk it."

"Look here, stranger, here's the family Bible; 'tain't much of a book, but it's got the record, and if you have half an eye yer can see that thar ain't been no entries made there for nigh on to forty years."

"I don't want any proof, friend; I am satisfied as to your identity."

"That's straight. And now, what's yer business?"

"Well, I will have to ask you to ride over here to-morrow."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes."

"Look here, stranger, I've come nigh on to forty miles to-day to see you."

"How did you come to know that I was looking for you?"

"Well, you have been inquiring along for the Light family?"

"I have."

"A chap that knew me just dropped me a letter, telling me there was a man looking for me, and as I didn't know whether it was fight or business, I thought I'd just help you find me."

"I'm glad you did; but hunting you up has got me into a scrape."

"What sort of a scrape?"

"I've been taken for a Government agent."

"Are you?"

"No."

"Well, see here, stranger, I'm Tom Light: I'm agin all these moonshiners, sure: your quarrel is mine;" and as Ingersol spoke he glared around at the men seated in the tavern.

Ingersol was met glare for glare.

His manner was offensive, and his words meant mischief, and no mistake.

"One of the men around here has challenged me," said Burgess.

"Challenged you?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"Because they have all made up their minds around here that I am a Government agent."

"Well, suppose you were a Government agent, does that give them the right to murder you?"

One of the men seated in the bar-room exclaimed:

"See here, stranger, it's my opinion that you are a bag of wind."

"Mebbe so, mebbe so, but I'm just a stop mule between your gang in any attempt to murder my friend here."

"Your friend has got himself in a quarrel, and he's got to get out of it."

"It strikes me that you are trying to get in one."

"I don't mind if I do."

Burgess now rose from his seat.

The man who had addressed Ingersol was a hang-dog, lanky, mean-looking cuss.

The Iron Detective walked over to where the man sat, and said:

"I don't think it was your put in, my friend."

The lank fellow had not been present upon either of the occasions when our hero had let out his great personal strength.

The fellow looked upon the detective as merely an ordinary man.

"Don't put in any more of your clack," said Burgess.

"I'll talk I reckon, when it suits me," cried the man, rising from his seat and shaking his great, lanky, long-nosed face under our hero's eyes.

"I reckon you had better git," said Burgess. Burgess knew that the moment for action had arrived.

He reached forward his iron arm and caught the man by the wrist.

The detective gave the fellow's wrist a twist.

The man struggled to free himself from that iron grasp.

His struggles were fruitless.

At this moment another man stepped forward, and said:

"Hold on, stranger; that's not fair to hold a man's wrist and twist it that way."

"What have you got to say about it?" cried Burgess.

"Let go that man's hand."

"Not much."

"Let go, I say."

Burgess suddenly dropped the wrist of the man he had been holding.

As the detective dropped the man's wrist, the latter let his hand fall to his side.

The arm was paralyzed for a spell at least.

As Burgess let go his hold upon the man's wrist, he caught him under the shoulders.

The thing was done so quickly that no one could have interfered even had he been so disposed.

Burgess walked to the open door and slung the fellow out into the road.

In the meantime, the man who had interfered had risen to his feet.

Burgess made a rush and seized him.

The man would have struggled, but he was in the hands of a marvelous man.

He also was slung out into the road.

Having made such a summary disposal of the two men, Burgess quietly walked over, and, taking his seat, said:

"Now go on, my friend, with what you were saying."

"Well, I was sort of promising to stand by you in case of trouble, but it strikes me you can take care of yourself pretty well."

"I generally have been able to do so."

"I should say so; the way you made those two chaps eat dust was a caution."

Iron Burgess knew well enough that the battle had just commenced.

A few moments passed.

Ingersol whispered a word in the detective's ear.

The landlord had been a silent witness of the scene.

Burgess was such a pleasant man, and so liberal with money, that the tavern-keeper had taken quite a liking to him.

The time had arrived, however, when he felt himself bound to interefere.

Advancing toward our hero, he said:

"Mr. Blakie, I am on your side when you are right, because you are my guest; but this time I think you are in the wrong."

"I understand you, Mr. Dickson."

"All right, sir; I'm sorry you've brought on this fight."

"I reckon it won't amount to much."

Burgess walked out of the tavern, followed by Ingersol.

The latter stepped along by the detective, and said:

"If I go down, friend, you'll find letters on my person directing you what to do; and now have you any orders yourself?"

"Only to send word on to the department at Washington that Al Burgess has settled at last, toes up. You see, my arrangements are always made to go over."

The loungers around the tavern had followed at a safe distance.

A whispered warning at his side caused Burgess to glance down the road.

Three men were approaching.

Two of them were the men whom Burgess had tossed out into the road; the other was evidently a brother of one of the men.

In the fight which ensued Ingersol was wounded, when the moonshiners took to flight.

CHAPTER XI.

Burgess knelt beside Ingersol.

The latter was conscious.

"I've got it," he said, and a smile overspread his face.

Burgess tore open his vest and searched for the wound.

A glad smile broke over his face, and in a cheering tone he asked:

"Can you see good?"

"Clear as day."

"Cheer up, old man, it's all right."

The detective turned his friend over and pulled down his shirt so that his back was exposed.

Burgess looked under Ingersol's shoulder.

"It's a bully cut, my friend," he said; "the ball's flat and there's no probing; you will be all right in a couple of weeks."

Burgess asked for assistance to carry his friend to the tavern.

He was refused in a surly tone.

The men claimed that they had not time, or were expected to assist their friends.

A colored man came along, and our hero secured his assistance in bearing Ingersol back to the tavern, which was but a short distance away.

Arrived at the tavern, he was met by Dickson.

"I'm sorry, friend," he said, "but you can not bring your comrade in here."

"You expect more trouble?"

"It's got to come, sure."

The negro now spoke up, and said:

"Massa, yer kin bring de wounded gemman down to my place, ef yer please."

The tavern-keeper said:

"You couldn't take him to a better place. The mother of Mose, there, is one of the best nurses in the State of Tennessee, and especially with gun-shot wounds."

"Dat am so, massa."

"All right, Mose; we will take my friend down to your home. How far is it?"

"Not far, sir; not far."

"I suppose you wish me to take away my traps?"

"It's better, sir. There is sure to be trouble, and it's no use advising you."

"You will keep my horse here?" asked the detective.

"Well, yes," answered the landlord; "I don't believe he'll be getting into any scrapes."

The conversation recorded above transpired in a few seconds.

The wounded man was carried down to the negro's cabin.

The latter was situated on the brow of a steep declivity, and abutted against a high wall of rock.

Indeed, the latter overhung the negro's humble home.

Burgess took in the location at a glance.

He saw that it was a fine natural strategical point.

An enemy would be compelled to approach either from the front or by flanking the place.

There was no approach from the rear, and no damage could be done by a foe overhead on the rocks.

It was a most excellent place for the standing of a siege.

The old negress at once set to work to take care of the wounded man.

In about two minutes Burgess saw that she understood her business, and in an ordinary case was worth half a dozen doctors.

Our hero walked out of the cabin, and sat down at the door.

The scene before him was peaceful and beautiful.

The sun was setting in all its regal splendors of crimson light.

The negro Moses joined him.

"Are you from the North, mister?"

"No, sir."

"You be a Southern man?"

"Yes."

"Had a pretty hard fight?"

"Yes."

"Guess dat yer ain't seed der end ob it, nohow, 'less yer skip."

"Thank you."

"Dey is awful people 'roun' heah—rudder fight den eat any time."

"So would I."

"But dar am ten ter one agin yer, stranger."

"Can't help it."

"Dar comes one o' de worst ob dem now," exclaimed the darky suddenly, as he pointed toward the figure of a man coming up the path.

Our hero recognized Jasper Knight.

"I see you've had a fight."

Knight had not been present during the bloody scrimmage.

"Yes; I was forced into one. They've set out to drive me away from here, and I am not to be driven."

"Well, stranger, I reckon you'll have to go now."

"Not a step."

"You're a good man, as I've told yer afore, but it's got to be a serious matter now."

At this moment further conversation was interrupted.

A female figure was seen approaching the house.

"By all that's strange, here comes Belle Granger!" cried Jasper Knight.

The detective was amazed when he saw the girl approaching.

He calculated that she had come to join her voice with Knight to prevail upon him to leave.

His conclusion proved correct.

Her first words were:

"You must fly."

"I can not leave my friend."

The girl approached and drew the detective's ear down opposite her fair lips.

Her face was as red as the corona of the setting sun, as in tremulous tones she whispered:

"For my sake, do not remain, but flee."

"But my wounded friend?"

"I will remain and guard him."

"And so will I," called out Jasper Knight.

"You can trust Jasper," whispered the girl. "I overheard him trying to prevail upon the men not to commit themselves to a cowardly deed of violence."

"I can do for your friend what I could not do for you," said Knight; "I can, under the circumstances, defend him with my life."

"If I go, I shall return and face these men."

"That will do when their fury is past, but it's death to remain now; and it's no part of a brave man to stand and face a mob when he's nothing to gain."

The detective moved away.

He was followed by the lovely girl, Belle Granger.

When they were a short distance off, she said:

"Let me lead you by a path well known to me."

"Does it lead toward the main road?"

"Yes."

"Lead on; no man ever had a more queenly leader."

The two walked along the path in silence.

The sun had set lower and lower.

At length the shadows that had been leaping from rock to rock vanished altogether.

They had emerged from the path, and were standing in a rocky glen.

Iron Burgess seized the girl's hand.

She sought to draw it away.

"Listen," said he; "I know now who it was that attempted to shoot me, and I know who it was that knocked the pistol aside, and who by that act saved my life."

The girl's face turned ashy white.

"Do not say any more," she murmured, and glanced around in a startled manner, as though she feared that the very rocks would overhear her, and repeat the words that were being spoken to her.

"Listen, I must speak. This may be my last night on earth; we may never meet again."

"But you have promised to flee from here."

"Never mind; I know just what perils surround me, and I wish to let you know that I am aware of your innocence."

"Say no more, I pray you."

"Yes; I have more to say. I wish to recall the words you whispered in my ear, the words that made a hope of life sufficiently dear to me to induce me to retreat from before the enemy."

"Oh, please do not recall those words hastily spoken."

There was a fascinating richness in the tone of Burgess's voice as he had been speaking.

"Do you know that when I met you on the cars it was not the first time we had met?"

"Yes, yes, I know it. But come; you have not a moment to spare."

"Do you remember when and where we first met?"

"I do."

"Where?"

"Not far from here. I remember the manly boy who scaled the rocks and rescued me from a perilous position."

"You remember all that?"

"I do."

"Did you recognize me when you saved my life?"

"No; not until I met you here."

"Belle, I must tell you something."

"No; say no more."

"After what you whispered to me, why do you show such reluctance to hear me speak?"

"I used any argument to induce you to save your life."

"Enough—I see," said Burgess, as a stern look settled upon his face.

CHAPTER XII.

At the same moment as our hero exclaimed "enough," he added:

"Come, we will go on."

"You are angry with me?"

"No."

"You think me false?"

"How could you prove false to me?" asked the detective in a surprised tone.

"My whispered words may have misled you Forget them."

"I will; they are already forgotten. We part here."

"Shall I hear from you?"

"Possibly."

The girl turned and walked slowly away.

"Strange creature. I have been cruel," muttered our hero. "She has a secret, and, like a brute, I was forcing her to reveal it," he added.

Night had fallen.

The detective knew the country round about the place where he found himself as well as any one.

He took a short cut directly toward the tavern.

He saw quite a gathering about the place.

He saw, but was not seen.

He had approached the tavern from the rear.

Low sheds and cook-houses extended back from the main building.

The detective crawled over these, and made his way to a window that opened into a long hall that divided the main building.

He passed through the window and made his way to the room that he had occupied.

His saddle-bags and traps were still in his room.

The detective had determined upon a most radical change in his personal appearance, as it was a desperate chance he was about to take.

The men were still gathered around the tavern.

They had not yet made a start.

A man came from the room occupied by the detective.

He looked as much like a mulatto as a white man.

There was no beard upon his face, and the latter was as dark as an Indian's.

He was dressed as a country teamster.

Iron Burgess had made such a transformation in his personal appearance that even the sharp-eyed Belle Granger would have failed to recognize him.

The bold man had determined to join the party of lynchers.

The party had just started, when the disguised detective joined them.

No attention was paid to him, all hands were so excited over the business in hand.

The detective asked a man what all the excitement was about.

The man proved to be a non-sympathizer with the mob.

"They are going to do a devilish job," was the answer.

A number of men were in front, carrying a rope.

"Judge Lynch around?" asked Burgess.

"Yes."

"Who is going to be hung?"

"A stranger who has been stopping at the tavern."

"What did he do to draw down on him the wrath of the people here?"

"There was a scrimmage this afternoon."

"Any one killed?"

"No."

"Any one badly hurt?"

"Yes; the stranger and a friend got the better of the fight."

"No one killed?"

"They say not."

"Any one likely to die?"

"No; unless it is the friend of the stranger."

It was not a great distance from the tavern to the negro's house.

As the crowd came up they saw Jasper Knight standing at the door.

Burgess heard one of the crowd say:

"There's Knight ahead of us to oppose this thing."

The detective was rejoiced to hear this remark.

He was now convinced that Jasper was a true man.

He would rather discover a man to be true than false any time.

As the crowd advanced, Jasper came down to meet them.

"You are too late, my good men."

"Too late?"

"Yes; the man you are after has gone."

"Sloped, eh?"

"Yes; acting under my advice."

"You're a traitor."

"You and I will talk that remark over later, Smith," called Jasper.

"Where is the wounded man?" asked one of the crowd.

"Inside, on his dying bed."

"Let's take him out and finish him!" cried one of the crowd.

"Would yer attack a dying man?"

"Yes," came the answer, with a yell.

Jasper Knight, planting himself before the door of the negro hut, called out:

"Who'll be the first man to try and cross that door-sill?"

An angry murmur went through the crowd.

At this moment the detective stepped forward.

Jasper Knight brought his weapons to bear on him, and said:

"Advance another step, and you are a dead man."

Some of the ringleaders in the crowd stepped forward, and stood behind the man whom Knight had threatened.

The detective said:

"Hold on there, Knight, till ye hear what I've got to say."

"Speak out."

"I was born on these mountains."

"So was I," answered Jasper.

"I don't know nothing about the merits of this case only what I heard you say."

"There's a dying man inside here."

"No one else?"

"No one but Moses and his mother."

"The man we're after ain't there?"

"He is not."

"I'll take yer word on honor."

On my honor, the man you chaps came to hang ain't here."

"Then see here, just let me step up beside you."

"What do you want beside me?"

"I'll tell you. I've got the merits of this case as it stands all correct. I'm no party to doing harm to a wounded man who got hurt in a square fight. I'm ag'in it. And, by Jehosophat! I'll stand to yer till I die."

The example of one brave man always has a great influence over a mob.

Had Jasper stood alone, the chances were that the mob would have overridden him; but when one of their own number stepped out and sided with him in such a determined manner, it made a great difference.

Another man, who was at heart a warm friend of Jasper, stepped forward and said:

"I'm ag'in injuring a wounded man."

Another and another joined Jasper.

The current was changing.

When the first break is thus made in the designs of a mob, the whole movement generally goes to pieces.

Ingersol was saved.

That furious mob would have disposed of him in a few moments had not Jasper Knight acted as a check to them.

Even Jasper's influence would have been overcome, and the deciding move came from the disguised detective.

His gallant turn over from the mob was like the little spurt of water that first undermines a crumbling bank.

One cool, long-headed, experienced man, in a desperate emergency, had controlled a hundred wild, excited men.

The crowd moved away.

The dark-faced man walked away with the crowd.

A short distance, however, and he left them, and returned toward the negro's cabin.

It was night, and the flickering light of the last torch had vanished, and only the light of the stars remained, when Burgess felt a light touch upon his arm.

He turned and beheld Belle Granger standing beside him.

"Strange and wonderful man! you have saved your friend."

"My friend?"

"Yes; even under your present garb I recognized you."

"You are a daring girl."

"You are a more daring man, and yet I fear you will remain and tempt fate too far."

"What difference does it make to Belle Granger? Has she not already admitted that the words she whispered in my ears were false?"

"Oh, I can not bear to hear such words from you."

The detective gave a start, and bending forward he fixed his keen eyes on the lovely girl's face.

"I will never compel you to hear them again," he said in a tender voice.

"Thank you; it may be that an explanation will never take place, but I would have you remember that I am not a false trifler; and again I beseech you—ay, even for my sake—leave this part of the country altogether."

"I will soon be prepared to go; but I can not do so until my business is concluded."

At this moment Jasper Knight came along.

Extending his hand toward the detective, he said:

"My friend, I can't say that I owe you my life, because I'd hev had a big scrimmage afore I went down, and I had lots of friends among those people; but you did me a great service."

"I believe you are a true man, Knight."

Knight looked sharply at the dark-faced man, and after a moment ejaculated:

"By all the hidden fires said to rage in this mountain, who are you?"

"I am one who always stands by a friend at any risk."

"As I live, you are a strange man, and a brave one."

"I could not leave my friend."

Jasper Knight was silent.

He had something to say, but evidently did not wish to speak in the presence of Belle Granger.

"When can I see you to have a talk with you?" he said, at length.

"I will be up to the tavern."

"After what has occurred?"

"Certainly."

"And will you throw your life away?"

"I will take all chances: and in the meantime, will you accompany Miss Granger?"

Jasper Knight and Belle Granger walked away, while the detective proceeded to the negro's hut.

Two hours later the usual number of loungers were gathered in the tavern bar-room.

All hands were discussing the events of the night.

It was wonderful what a number of valiant and knowing men had come to the front.

Among those assembled was Jasper Knight.

A game of cards was in progress.

One man made the remark:

"I knew that fellow was skeered out of his life all the time, and was likely at any moment to skip away."

"He didn't skip very far," came a voice, and Iron Burgess stepped into the room and stood over the table.

CHAPTER XIII.

Had a school of hissing rattlesnakes crawled in among those men they could not have created greater consternation than did the appearance of the detective.

Jasper Knight was the only one present at the moment who betrayed neither disturbance nor surprise.

After gazing around for a few seconds, the detective asked, in a quiet, natural tone:

"Where's Snedicon?"

"He is not here."

"Do you expect him?"

"Yes; it's about his usual time for dropping in."

"All right; I'll wait for him."

A moment later Snedicon entered the room.

The instant the distiller's eyes rested upon our hero, he turned pale.

"I had an appointment with you," said Burgess, rising from the seat he had taken.

"I believe you did have an appointment with me."

"I am on hand now."

"My friend is not present," said Snedicon.

"You wish to crawl, eh?"

"No, sir."

"Then there's a number of good men here, any one of whom will act for you."

"I am agreed," said the distiller.

"Enough. I will call on Knight to act for me; you may select whom you choose. I will only call on you as a man to pledge yourself that I am not mobbed."

"You have my pledge."

"As I am a stranger and alone here among you, even accepting one of your own number as my second in this affair, I shall call upon all the gentlemen present to ratify your pledge."

There was a rude sense of honor among all those men, and at once the assurance was given on every hand that the pledge should be sacredly maintained.

Snedicon selected a man to act as his friend, and the latter and Jasper Knight held a few moments' consultation.

Burgess in the meanwhile went to his room.

He had been there but a few moments, when, upon looking up, he saw a human face through the partly opened door.

It was the pale but wondrously beautiful face of Belle Granger.

"Can I come in?" she asked.

"Come in," answered the detective.

The girl sighed heavily as she crossed the threshold and seated herself in a chair.

In a voice full of tears and sadness she said:

"Oh, would that I could persuade you to flee."

"You can not."

"Not, if I say, for my sake."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Those words have lost their charm—they were idle."

The beautiful girl's face became transfixed.

Every tender blue vein appeared frozen.

When she opened her lips to speak it was as though a marble statue had received the gift of speech.

"I must prevail upon you," she said.

"You can not."

"If you die, my life goes out also."

"Strange, wayward girl," cried the detective, as he sought to seize her hand, "why do you speak thus?"

The girl buried her fair head on the iron man's bosom, and murmured:

"You must not go to this scene of blood, because I love you."

The detective's heart stood still.

He gently closed his great strong hands upon the girl's head, and did not speak.

A moment they thus remained, when Belle withdrew her head from his bosom, and, looking up into his eyes, asked:

"Will you still go?"

Burgess bent forward to imprint a kiss upon her lips, when she sprung from him as though an adder had darted its forked tongue at her.

The detective gazed at her in astonishment.

"What means this?" he asked.

"I can say no more. Heaven forgive me for the confession I have made!" and, without another word, she left the room.

A moment later, and the detective was down in the bar-room.

The arrangements for the duel had been completed in the most satisfactory manner.

It was a bright moonlight night. Not a breath of air stirred upon the mountains.

The combatants walked out, and proceeded toward the point where the encounter was to take place.

No effort was made to settle the matter and avoid an exchange of shots.

Every one knew such an attempt would be useless.

Snedicon was determined on revenge, and only one thing would satisfy him.

Iron Burgess had no intention of injuring his antagonist, and trusted to his usual good luck and coolness to extricate him from the difficulty.

Only such a man as Burgess would have acted upon the plan which he hit upon.

The men were in position.

But one flash was seen, but one report was heard.

Iron Burgess stood in his tracks, steady as a rock.

The result was plain.

The detective had stood Snedicon's fire, had taken all the risk, and now held the distiller at his mercy.

Calmly and slowly the detective raised his weapon skyward; then came a flash and a report, and the bullet sped harmlessly toward the stars.

The detective had given Snedicon his life.

The latter's second came forward and said:

"We are satisfied;" and, without another word, the men separated.

Iron Burgess, accompanied by Jasper Knight, returned to the tavern.

A few moments later, and the landlord was joined by some of the men who had witnessed the combat.

"Snedicon's down?" he said.

"No," answered the man. And he told how the stranger, Blakie, had spared the distiller's life.

"You can bet all you are worth in the world," said the landlord, "that the man is not a Government agent."

"That's my way of thinking," returned the man. And when the others returned to the tavern, it was agreed on all sides that they had all been mistaken.

Iron Burgess had gone through many perils, and had carried his points.

At last he had led the rough men around those parts to disbelieve that he was their foe.

The time had come when a terrible example must be made.

Snedicon was the only man around there who still believed that Burgess was a Government agent.

He knew that he was, as the young man Harrison, Belle Granger's step-brother, had told the distiller a part of the truth.

The distiller went to his home, where he met a man who had heard of the combat, and had come over to inquire about it.

"You met the Government agent to-night in a duel?" he said.

"I did."

"And how did you come out?"

"The fellow spared my life."

"Why didn't he drop you when he had the bead dead sure on you?"

"Well, in the first place, if he had dropped me, he would have been compelled to leave these parts."

"That's so."

"Now he has placed me under obligations. I can not attack him openly, and he has an excuse to lay around here."

"Do you suppose he is picking up any points on us?"

"You can make up your mind that he has been picking up points every hour that he has been here."

"What points has he got?"

"You can make up your mind that he has the pedigree of every man engaged in the business."

"That's bad."

"You can bet he has the location, capacity, and all the facts concerning every distillery in the district."

"How is he getting all this?"

"Well, if he would tell us, we might head him off; but he's a man who works in the dark."

Neither one of the men who were carrying on the above-recorded conversation saw a dark figure concealed in the brush near where they were standing.

Even at that very moment Iron Burgess was proving the very estimate Snedicon was giving concerning him.

As related, Jasper Knight had followed our hero to his room immediately after the duel.

The two men had not exchanged one word until they were in the room, when Jasper Knight had asked:

"Why didn't yer down him?"

"I may down him yet."

"It may be too late; he'll work in the dark. Now, friend, I tell you Snedicon is a man who has neither honor, soul, nor conscience, and when you had him you ought to have downed him."

Burgess had a plan in his mind, and wished to get rid of Knight.

"I reckon I'll turn in," he said, without making any comment on Jasper's last remark.

"That means for me to git?"

"Well, I am much obliged to you for standing by me through the scene just past."

"Well, I'm going to speak out plain. I've a stake in this business you've come down here to destroy."

The detective was silent.

"I'm sorry to turn ag'in yer, because you are a man I like. I've nothing ag'in yer for being in the government employ; it's yer business, and yer all right—every man to his trade; but I want to be fair and square, and I tell yer if yer stay around here I'm ag'in yer."

"I am not a Government agent, Knight, and it matters not to any man what my business is; and if you are against me, it's all right. I'm going to stay around here until my business is finished."

"All right; you know yer own affairs, but from this time out you and I will understand each other. I've not asked yer confidence since the first time, and you have not given it to me. I've stood up for yer, but now the time's come when I must quit and join in with the rest of them to hunt you away."

"Well, good-night, old man. I've had but little sleep, and need it now."

"Ye're bound to stay?"

"I am."

"Well, good-bye, stranger."

Burgess threw himself upon the bed, and Knight went away.

The moment Jasper had gone, the detective leaped from the bed.

Our hero's point was to watch the man Snedicon, and it was with the intention of taking a few observations around the latter's house that he leaped from bed the moment Jasper had left his room.

It took him but a few moments to don the disguise he had chosen for the occasion, and he stole from his room.

Once more, like a pale apparition, Belle Granger appeared before him. The girl seemed like some restless ghost that would not down.

Approaching the detective, she gently pushed him back toward his room.

"You are going out upon some desperate expedition?" she said.

"I am determined to conclude my business before I leave this part of the country."

"I can do no more," said the girl; "I have warned you time and again. I will tell you one thing, however; if you are murdered on these mountains, I shall live the balance of my life with a heart of stone."

Iron Burgess could not stand this last remark.

The girl had only been standing on the threshold of the door. The detective drew her into the room and closed the door.

"Belle," he said, and his tones were rich and full of feeling, "I have forborne to speak to you, but the moment has come when I must and will speak. Had you not come to me, I would have preserved my silence."

"Come life, come death, honor or dishonor, I will listen to you, Alfred Burgess."

"Belle, I never knew what it was to love until I saw your face. I have met many beautiful women, but I have carried in my bosom a heart of stone. From the first moment I met you I have loved you."

Belle's face was transfixed as she listened to those words.

"Are you done speaking?"

"I am."

"I must go."

"You have not one word?"

"Oh! would that I could speak."

"My dear girl, explain this strange mystery. What dreadful spell is it that closes your lips?"

"If we ever meet again on earth I will speak."

"You promise me that?"

"As I live, I promise that if ever you and I meet again on earth I will explain why I have been silent."

CHAPTER XIV.

The girl left the room, and a few moments later, Burgess, in a proper disguise, left the house by the window and over the sheds.

He was on the track of Snedicon, and proceeded direct toward the latter's house.

On the way he came across a man proceeding along the road.

The detective stole close behind the man, and recognized him as the chief distiller. Keeping upon Snedicon's track, he followed him until he met with the other man with whom the conversation passed as previously recorded.

It was a strange premonition that had led our hero upon the track of his arch-enemy.

The chances are that, had he not done so, his fate would have been sealed, as a deep and desperate plan was arranged.

"You know where to find Black Jess?" asked Snedicon.

"Yes."

"When can you see him?"

"This very night."

"I will tell you something," said Snedicon. "While Jess is about it, he had better watch that wounded man lying at the nigger Moses' cabin."

"All right; I will see Black Jess within han an hour."

The two men separated.

The detective had no more business for the moment with Snedicon, and he started to follow the other man, whose name was Smith.

Smith had told the truth when he said that he could put his hand on Black Jess.

About a mile and a half from Snedicon's house he came upon a dark figure lying upon a rock.

Smith gave the sleeping man a kick.

The wretch leaped up with a grunt.

The detective stole forward to take a full view of the black villain who had been selected as their tool.

The negro was truly a terrible fellow to look at.

He was almost as broad as he was long, and his arms reached away below his knees.

He was evidently a creature of most prodigious personal strength.

He looked only about semi-human, and was certainly a terrible fellow to have a personal encounter with under any circumstances.

The detective took the wretch's measure while listening to what passed between him and Smith.

"How long have you waited for me, Jess?" asked Smith.

"Not long, massa."

"I've a job for you."

"Jes' what dis yere chile tought when he heerd yer wanted to see him."

"There's a man down from the East looking for you, Jess."

"Dar hab been plenty men lookin' for dis yere chile long back, Massa Smith, yes, some ob dem hab stopped lookin' for enybody, dough, now."

"This man is a Government agent, and he has made his boasts that he will not only clear out all the mountain whisky men, but he will capture Black Jess."

"Golly! I'd jes' like ter look at der chile."

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Jess; I'll give you the best double-barreled shotgun ever owned in the mountains."

"I'se jes' gwine ter see him, Massa Smith, dat am shuah; all yer hab got to do is jes' tell dis yere chile whar to find 'im, and he's got ter go."

"You will find two white men at Moses' cabin."

"I know dat place."

Smith then proceeded to describe both Burgess and his friend.

"I'se jes' got 'em bofe photemgraphed, Massa Smith."

"I can depend on you?"

"Yer kin jes' bet yer kin when dar's a shotgun roun', shuah."

"Well, good-night, Jess."

"Good-night, Massa Smith; and dis yere chile will jes' go an' 'possum roun' ole Moses' cabin."

Smith walked away after having made his iniquitous bargain with the black.

Burgess had no further business with Smith just at the moment; all his attention was to be bestowed on the horrible creature, Black Jess.

The negro stood chuckling to himself, when suddenly he exclaimed:

"What's dat?"

A man had suddenly confronted him.

Iron Burgess did not fear a dozen Black Jesses.

The half-breed gazed with rolling eyes at the stranger who had so suddenly stepped before him.

His great eyes rolled in astonishment for an instant, and then settled down to a fierce look, while he gritted his teeth and swayed his head to and fro.

"Where are you going, you horrible imp?" asked the detective.

"Who you call an imp?"

"I call you an imp."

"Better go 'way—better go 'way!" growled the half-breed.

"Why should I go away?"

"Ef yer don't, dis yer chile might hurt yer."

"Just drop that gun. You can't kill any one round here."

The half-breed did not drop the gun, but made a movement to bring it to his shoulder.

There followed a slight struggle, and the gun, an ordinary double-barreled fowling-piece, was broken in two pieces.

Burgess forced the wretch to his knees, and finally laid him on his back, and placing his knee upon his throat, pinned him to the ground.

"Say your prayers."

"Yer gwine to kill me, massa?"

"I am going to kill you."

"Yer won't hab mercy?"

"You must die, and you have but a few seconds to spare."

"Dis yere chile nebber prayed, massa; I jes' don't know how to pray; nobody eber taught dis yere chile to pray."

The poor, miserable object uttered the above words in a perfectly child-like manner.

Their very simplicity went direct to Iron Burgess's heart.

The latter had not from the first intended to kill the poor wretch, who, despite his black skin, his horrid form, and his many crimes, had a human soul.

"Suppose I spare your life?"

"Do, massa: I'se a poor nigger dat's been hunted like a wild beast ebber since I wer born. I wouldn't done anybody no harm in the first place, but eberybody wants ter shoot dis yere chile down."

"Do you know who I am?"

"Nebber seed you afore, massa."

"I am the man you were to have found in Moses' cabin."

"Dat's so? Well, dis yere chile didn't know dat nohow."

"Suppose I spare your life?"

"I do whatever you say, massa."

"No; I will spare your life on one condition."

"What yer want me to do, massa?"

"I want you to promise me that you will never harm another man, woman, or child as long as you live, unless you are compelled to do it to save your own life."

"I nebber kill nobody no moah, massa."

"You know what a promise is?"

"Yes, sah, shuah."

"And you will keep your word?"

"I sw'ar I will, massa."

"Well, get up," said Burgess, and he rose from off the wretch he had mastered.

CHAPTER XV.

The negro rose and put out his hand, and in a manner as simple as a child, said:

"Thank yer, massa, I'se yer slave."

"I'll call you Pete."

"Dat's dis yere chile's real name, massa."

"All right, Pete; and now do you want to help me?"

"Shuah, massa."

"Have you any friends on the mountains?"

"Dis yere chile ain't got no friends in de world, 'cept you, massa."

"If you are faithful to me, I will be a good friend to you."

"Oh, I'se boun' ter be faithful, massa."

"You will serve me honestly?"

"Shuah as I lib, massa; what I call yer?"

"Alfred."

"I'se got no fren' in de world but you, Massa Alfred, and I'se gwine ter serb yer, you bet."

"All right. You were to meet Smith here in the morning?"

"Yes, sah, dat am so."

"I want you to meet him."

"All right, massa, I meet him."

"I want you to tell him that you have killed me."

"All right, massa, jes' as yer say."

"In the meantime I want you to kill a rabbit, and spatter the blood around, and show Smith just where the deed was done."

"All right, Massa Alfred."

"I can depend upon you?"

"Yes, sah shuah."

"Good-night."

"Good-night, massa. But when dis yere chile gwine ter see yer again?"

"I'll find you when I want you."

"'Tain't safe for dis yere chile ter hang roun' heah, Massa Alfred."

"I know that; but you need not be afraid, I'll look out for you."

Without another word the detective darted away and disappeared in the darkness.

After leaving Pete, the monster whom he had overcome in such a remarkable manner, our hero proceeded direct to the cabin where his friend Tom Ingersol lay.

Burgess had arrived in sight of the cabin, when just ahead of him he saw the figure of a man stealing forward.

There was a light in the cabin, and the form of Ingersol, lying upon the bed, could be plainly seen from without.

As the detective stole closer toward the man he saw stealing through the darkness, he observed that the prowler carried a rifle.

"My God!" muttered our hero between his teeth. "Heaven has directed my steps hither just in time."

His conclusion was almost immediately confirmed.

He saw the man stealing toward a position whence he could command a view directly into the room.

The detective stole forward upon the heels of the man, and was not more than twenty feet away from him when the man stumbled.

Burgess dropped down in the grass and waited.

He saw the man stumble, and at the same moment a flash illuminated the darkness of the night, a smothered report broke the stillness, and the man fell.

Fully ten minutes passed, and Burgess lay low and watched.

No sound broke the stillness, and he did not see a moving figure.

Slowly, but on his guard, he advanced toward the fallen man.

Still no sound broke the stillness.

Our hero stood a few feet off, and surveyed the prostrate man.

The man lay upon his face.

Burgess turned him over, and with a startled cry started back, exclaiming, in a low tone:

"It was fate."

The victim of the accident was the step-brother of the strange but beautiful girl, Belle Granger.

Burgess knelt and put his hand to the man's heart.

The heart was silent forever.

There was no chance for hope; never again would that man conceive good or bad deeds: his race had been run.

"I am sorry," muttered Burgess, "as God is my witness."

The detective had spoken the words to himself, but as he uttered them he felt a hand laid upon his shoulder.

He looked up, and his gaze rested upon a face as pale as that of the dead man.

"You here?" cried the detective.

"I am here."

It was Belle Granger who had stolen silently forward and laid her hand on the detective's shoulder.

"I could not help it, Belle."

"I believe you, Alfred Burgess."

"You may believe me, Belle."

"Why remain around here? Tragedy follows tragedy."

"The hour approaches when I shall leave these parts."

"Go now."

"No; I must remain and finish my work. I can not help it."

"Come."

"You say come?"

"I do."

"I do not understand you, Belle."

"I will go with you."

"Do you mean what you say, Belle?"

"I do."

"Ah, Belle! would that I could understand you."

"You can; there is no tie to keep me here. You said you loved me—I love you."

"Belle, what was that man to you?" and as our hero spoke, he pointed to the dead form lying cold, still, and ghastly before them.

"He was my bitterest foe."

"Whence his strange power over you?"

"I have a strange story to tell."

"Tell it now."

"My story is briefly told."

"I am listening."

"That man's mother was my step-mother."

"Yes."

"She was a noble woman."

"Yes."

"She loved me, and I loved her as dearly as though she had been my own mother; and there was a day when I loved that man as a sister loves a brother. I thought him pure and noble."

Iron Burgess's heart stood still. He expected to hear a terrible revelation, a fearful mystery opened that would dig a gulf between Belle Granger and himself forever.

"Go on, Belle," he said, as the girl hesitated a moment.

"That man's mother idolized him, and on her death-bed she urged me to marry him."

"And you consented?"

"Let me tell you."

"No, Belle, tell me no more."

"Yes, you must hear the whole story. I did not wish to marry him, although I was heart and fancy-free, but at length, believing him true and noble, I promised."

"And you kept your promise?"

"Listen. My step-mother made me take a solemn oath that I would wed her son."

"Foolish girl!"

"After I had taken the oath, and after his mother had died, I discovered that my step-brother, my affianced husband, was a cruel, merciless villain."

"And yet you married him?"

"Never."

Burgess grasped her hand, and his face was all aglow and his eyes aflame as he asked:

"And he was never your husband?"

"Never. I would not keep my vow. I did not; I would not marry him, but I did not feel free to marry any one else."

"And the whole truth is told?"

"The whole truth."

"Thank Heaven, Belle! And yet, dear girl, I regret that my happiness should come in this terrible way."

"Alfred, you need have no regrets; that man was a false hearted traitor; it was he who attempted your life at the depot in Washington. He had learned in some strange manner who you were, and that you were coming down here. It was to save your life I stole into your bedroom in the hotel in New York."

"Dear and faithful girl, how you have proved yourself my friend."

"I have not told you all the truth. I was not left penniless, but that man secured every dollar of my fortune and squandered it, and he subjected me to personal abuse; and that is why my aunt, Mrs. Dickson, came to Washington and brought me to live with her."

"Belle, this is all a strange and remarkable narrative; and now listen to me—you must return to your aunt for a few days."

"You will not give up this perilous duty?"

"This duty is almost completed—the danger is all past; ere to-morrow morning the men who seek my life will think that I am dead."

"Oh! come, leave now."

"Would you have me leave my friend?"

"We can carry him to a place of safety."

"No, dear girl; be guided by me."

At that moment steps were heard.

"Ah! some one comes this way," whispered he detective, as he drew Belle back behind a clump of bushes.

The detective watched, and a few moments later saw the tall form of a man proceeding directly toward the negro's cabin.

"Remain here, Belle."

And the detective advancing near to the man, exclaimed:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

The man turned about, and our hero recognized the face of Jasper Knight.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Is that you, Blakie?" exclaimed Knight, in surprise, adding, "I am glad I met you."

"I am here. What is your business?" answered Burgess.

"I will assist you to get your friend away from here. There's a scheme on foot to lynch him."

"Yes? And you would have been too late to save him had I not been on hand. But I am just as grateful to you for your interest in behalf of my friend."

There was a rustle in the bushes where Belle Granger lay concealed. Jasper Knight made a step as though to investigate, when Burgess stepped before him, and said:

"I know who is there."

"I want to know as well."

"You can not."

"Very well. Do you decline my assistance?"

"I do; and I would advise you to look to the advice I gave you once before."

"What was that?"

"Sell out, for the moonshine trade around here is doomed."

"Well, Blakie, as I can't serve you I will get along; but remember your friend; as far as you are concerned yourself you are already warned."

"I am."

Jasper Knight walked away.

Iron Burgess was not deceived, but knew the man would lay low to learn who was concealed in the bushes.

Should Belle be discoverd she would be, unfortunately, compromised. A week later Burgess would have cared nothing about it, but as matters stood a discovery would prove very awkward.

He feared that the moment Knight passed from view, Belle would come forth and betray her presence.

The detective sidled toward the spot, and in a low whisper, called:

"Lay low until I warn you."

A slight movement in the bushes told him that his warning was heard.

Our hero went to the house and summoned Moses, the negro.

The latter had retired for the night, but shortly appeared with the inquiry:

"Who's dar?"

Moses was an honest fellow. Burgess had satisfied himself of the latter fact.

"There's been trouble, Moses, my man."

"Am dat you, Massa Blakie?"

"Yes."

"What were de trouble?"

The detective related just what had occurred.

"Dat am awful, massa."

"Will you assist me to remove my friend?"

"Yes, sah; yes, sah. But whar yer gwine ter take him?"

"I must take him somewhere."

"All right; guess dat he might walk a bit; heerd de ole woman tell him he might walk aroun' a leetle way in der mornin'."

"I am glad to hear it, so you go and prepare him for a move while I scout around and learn if there are any more men lurking in the brush."

The real object of the detective was to learn whether or not Jasper Knight was lurking around.

Mose went to the cabin to prepare the wounded Ingersol for removal, while our hero scouted around to discover some trace of Knight.

Knight had taken a circular course, and his trail led directly up to the thicket where the beautiful Belle Granger sat hidden from view.

The discovery that our hero dreaded seemed imminent.

Burgess had advanced rapidly, and came upon Jasper Knight just as the latter had dropped upon his hands and knees to crawl forward.

"Hold on, Knight, that's a sneaking game you are at."

Knight rose to his feet, his eyes blazed with rage.

"I think you have been dogging my steps."

"I have."

"I didn't want any trouble with you, Blakie."

"Had you gone about your business, there would have been no trouble."

"I can't stand this."

"You will stand where you are without advancing another step toward the point you were aiming at."

"All is fair in war, Blakie."

"That's the reason I dogged you."

"And, that's the reason why I want to know who lies concealed in yonder thicket."

"You can't learn."

"I will."

"You know what I mean when I speak."

"I do; you are a good man, Blakie, and I had hoped you and I would never come to blows, but you must learn that Jasper Knight fears no man."

"Jasper Knight knows his own business, I reckon," answered Burgess; "but Jasper Knight or no other man can advance when I say halt."

"Say it is not a woman lying in there, and I will apologize and git."

The secret was out. Jasper Knight, for some strange reason, suspected that Belle Granger was hidden by the brush.

"It's none of your business who lies concealed there."

"We must fight, Blakie."

The detective felt forced into the combat. He would have preferred not to enter into a life-and-death contest with Jasper Knight of all men on the mountains; but the honor of the woman who might some day become his wife made it necessary for him to accept the challenge.

Belle Granger's presence must not be disclosed at any hazard.

At that moment a figure in white suddenly appeared between them.

"Hold!" she cried, and a fair hand was extended toward either man.

"Aha!" exclaimed Jasper Knight, and his face became distorted with rage and jealousy.

"Belle, you need not have come forth; I would have settled this meddlesome fellow."

"You shall have a chance to settle this meddlesome fellow!" cried Knight; and turning toward Belle Granger, he added in tones of cutting significance: "I did not expect to meet you here, Miss Granger."

"I came here to prevent a crime; the same errand that brought you here brought me also."

"Oh, yes; of course you would have an excellent excuse for meeting a man at this hour."

There was insult and implication in Jasper Knight's tone and manner.

Iron Burgess had stood silent during the foregoing conversation; but at length he said, in his usual quiet manner:

"Jasper Knight, your language is insulting."

"Is it?"

"Yes, sir; and you owe Miss Granger an apology."

"I never apologize for telling the truth; at the same time, I will admit that I am laboring under a mistake, on one condition."

"You shall recall what you have said without condition."

"Never."

"Belle, you are a Southern woman; do you intend to compel me to allow this man to insult you in my presence?"

"Jasper Knight, what is your condition for recalling your words?"

"You have no further call here; return to the tavern with me, and I will recall my words."

"Miss Granger returns to the tavern alone; you are to remain here to settle a little matter with me," interrupted Burgess, without permitting Belle to reply.

"I agree to that," said Knight.

"No, no, I will return to the tavern with you, Jasper Knight. I know why you two gentlemen would remain."

"Very well; you so elect; return with Knight."

"I do it for the best; come, Mr. Knight."

"I recall my wicked insinuations, Miss Granger," said Knight, as a smile of triumph lighted up his face.

Knight and Belle walked away, when the former turned and said:

"I will hold myself at your command at any time, Blakie."

Iron Burgess stood with folded arms, calm and motionless.

After Belle and Knight had disappeared, he muttered:

"It may be for the best;" and he walked through the thicket and proceeded toward the cabin where Mose was preparing his friend for removal.

"You will have to vacate your cabin for evermore, Mose," said Burgess.

"I guess dat am so, massa; dar ain't no use for dis yere chile to try and lib' roun' heah any moah."

"I reckon it hasn't been much of a living."

"Dat am so, Massa Blakie, but den it wer a libin'."

"You don't wish to remain?"

"No, sah."

The negro's mother came forward, leading Ingersol.

The latter had not seen Burgess for some days. The two men shook hands in a cordial manner, and the march was taken up.

As our hero had told Belle Granger, his work down in that region was almost complete.

Day had dawned when our hero reached a cavern far back in the recesses of the mountain.

He had known the place from boyhood, and knew very well that none but quite a large body of men would dare penetrate there with hostile intent; and it was his purpose to keep about all the moonshiners busy in another direction during the few days that were to follow.

The detective lay in concealment at the secret cavern for two days.

In the meantime, stirring incidents were occurring in which he took no part until later.

Belle Granger had agreed to return to the tavern with Jasper Knight, only, woman-like, that she might prevent an encounter.

The two walked along in silence for some distance, when Jasper Knight broke the silence by asking:

"How do you intend to mourn for your step-brother, Belle?"

"That is a strange question, Jasper Knight," replied Belle.

"I've something to tell you."

The girl's heart began to throb wildly.

Jasper Knight had never made love to her, but there was no mistaking his tone and manner at the moment.

"I hope you will not mention any important matter to me at such a time as this, Jasper."

"Mebbe it is about the best time; and the fact is, Belle Granger, I've been in love with you for a long time."

"I am sorry, Jasper."

"You are sorry?"

"I am."

"Why?"

"Simply because I can not return your love."

"You haven't had time to think about it yet."

"I do not require any time to think about it. I can never love you, Jasper, only as a friend."

"And you will not marry me?"

"I can not."

"You can if you have a mind to marry me."

"I can not, Jasper."

"I reckon I know why you can not marry me."

"Then I trust you will never mention this subject to me again."

"I shall, though."

"No; you are too brave and manly for that, Jasper."

"I might be only for one thing."

"And what is that one thing, Jasper?"

"You have gone and fallen in love with that sneakin' Government agent, and you shall never marry him as long a I am above ground."

"It is not right and just for you to speak in that manner."

"I don't care much in this matter about what is right or what is just; all I know is that I want to marry you, and as long as I do no other man shall make you his wife."

"I think that is a matter that rests entirely with me."

"We won't talk any more about it just now, Belle, but when I come to talk with you again you may feel differently."

A cold chill went through Belle's heart upon hearing these words.

There was no mistaking the import. Jasper Knight had now a motive for joining the enemies of Iron Burgess.

Belle made up her mind that upon the following day she would search for the detective at all hazards, find him out, urge him in terms that he could not turn a deaf ear to to fly from the dangerous vicinity.

Knight kept his word and said no more about his love during the remainder of his walk to the tavern.

When Belle entered the house she encountered an incident that had hitherto been spared her in her experience.

Her aunt had discovered her absence from the house, and took her to task in a severe manner.

Belle told of her step-brother's death, and the aunt was silenced.

In the meantime, Jasper Knight had told the men gathered at the tavern of the same tragic event.

A party was at once organized to proceed and bring in the body.

Jasper joined the party, thoroughly resolved to settle all his differences with Blakie that very night.

When the men reached the negro's quarters they found the body of Harrison; but upon proceeding to the house, found it deserted.

Harrison's body was carried to the tavern.

Upon the following day the funeral took place. There was no investigation as to the manner of his death; for a season, under the sway of the whisky men, all law had been set at defiance.

The distiller Smith was among those who attended the funeral; and after the body had been deposited in the grave, a number of men held a meeting, and it was decided that a second meeting should be held that night, when most decided measures would be adopted.

CHAPTER XVII.

SMITH, the distiller, was on his way to his home. It was after dark, and he was following a part of the road that led through a dense growth of trees, when suddenly his horse showed great signs of terror.

Smith at once dismounted, and led his horse forward, keeping himself covered by the body of his steed.

Thus the man had advanced some distance, when his horse began to rear and plunge, and his master called out:

"Who's there?"

There was a rustle in the brush, and in an instant the huge negro emerged from a thicket, and appeared upon the road.

"I'se here, Massa Smith."

"Hush! speak low."

"All right, sah; but it am done," said the negro, obeying Burgess's instruction.

"When did you do it?"

"'Bout an hour ago; but mebbe I didn't jes' git der right man."

Smith was pale and excited. The man was not wholly bereft of all sentiments of humanity.

"How are we going to find out whether you got the right man or not?"

"All yer hab got ter do is jes' follow dis yere chile."

Smith tethered his horse and followed the negro he had employed.

The negro led the distiller to a lonely spot, fully a mile from the main road, on the verge of a precipice, at the bottom of which roared a mountain stream over its rocky bed.

"Dis yere wer' de place, sah," said the negro, again showing his teeth.

"Where is the man?"

"Golly, Massa Smith, I jes' sent him ober de crag."

"Then how am I to identify it?"

"I jes' kept de clo'es heah, Massa Smith. Yer kin tell de man by his clo'es, I reckon."

As the negro spoke he held up some clothes.

Smith had a lantern with him, and by its light he examined the clothes. There was no mistaking them.

"How am dat, Massa Smith? Am he de right man?"

"Come to my house to-morrow at dawn, and you shall have the gun."

"I'se jes' gwine to be dar, Massa Smith."

The latter was glad to walk back toward the road.

Smith reached the spot where his horse had been tethered.

He did not continue his way to his home, but headed toward the tavern.

On the road he met an employé, and ordered him to mount a horse, and notify all the men round about who were interested to meet at the tavern.

It was midnight when quite a number were gathered.

When all were assembled, Smith arose and stated that all danger was past.

The men assembled gazed at him in astonishment, and one of them asked:

"What danger is past?"

"Blakie, the Government agent, has paid the penalty of coming down here to sneak around and pry out other people's business."

Jasper Knight asked:

"Is Blakie dead?"

"He is."

"Bah! you could never make me believe that until I had seen the body."

"I have seen the body."

Men sometimes when contradicted will rashly make an assertion that afterward they feel bound to stick to at all hazards.

"Do you mean to tell me that Blakie is dead, and you saw his body?"

"I tell you he is dead, and I saw his body."

"When?"

"Less than three hours ago."

"Lead us all to where his body lies."

"It will never appear more until Judgment Day. As soon as I identified the body, I had it thrown over the cliff."

And Smith proceeded and related all that had occurred, merely changing his story so as to make it appear that it was the result of an accidental meeting, and he also stuck to the statement that he had seen and fully identified the body.

Jasper Knight stole forth from that meeting.

Upon entering the room, he had seen a pale, anxious girl watching the movements of the men as they assembled.

When Knight came from that room, he saw the pale, beautiful face once more.

He ascended the stairs, and said, in a low whisper.

"Belle Granger, I've news for you."

The girl fixed a terrified look upon the man, and said:

"It can not be true."

"It is true," answered Knight, "Blakie is dead."

* * * * *

Upon the morning following the incidents recorded, Jasper Knight hastened over to the tavern.

He inquired for Belle Granger.

Word was brought to him that the young lady had not made her appearance.

Knight asked to see her aunt, and was compelled to wait a long time.

At length the aunt appeared. The woman's face showed that she was laboring under some great excitement.

Knight advanced to her, and asked:

"What is the matter?"

In wild tones, the woman declared:

"Belle, my niece, has most strangely disappeared."

Jasper Knight gazed at the aunt with a look of incredulity upon his face.

"Disappeared!" he exclaimed.

"Yes; I have just come from her room, and her bed has not been disturbed. Poor child! the excitement round here has driven her mad. We shall have to commence a search for her at once."

Two days followed the scenes above recorded, and during that time a most careful search had been made for Belle Granger.

The search had proven a total failure.

All manner of rumors were afloat.

The first theory was that the girl had run away; but certain startling discoveries had been made that dispelled the runaway theory.

Amid all the excitement, one man remained cool and thoughtful.

Jasper Knight kept his suspicions to himself.

As stated, two days and nights had passed since the discovery of Belle's absence, and no actual clew had been discovered.

Upon the third night an unusual number of men had gathered in Dickson's tavern.

An hour before midnight the loungers within the bar-room were startled by cries and moans without.

All hands started and listened.

Jasper Knight was, as usual, at a card-table, and he was the first to break the silence that followed the cries that had startled them.

"Some one is without there in distress," he exclaimed.

All sat and listened in an awe-stricken manner when, ever and anon, during the lulls in the howl of the wind, feeble groans would be heard.

At length Jasper Knight exclaimed:

"Heavens! we must not sit here and stare into one another's faces like so many idiots, while some poor soul is dying for want of help at the very door."

The man rose from his seat, and stepped out upon the porch. He could see nothing, and the wind drove the rain and sleet in his face.

A moment he stood, and once more he heard groans. Knight stepped off the porch and proceeded amid the blinding storm toward the spot whence the groans of pain and agony proceeded.

He had gone about fifty feet from the tavern porch, when he came upon the form of a man lying in the mud and water.

"What are you doing here?" asked Knight.

"I am old Travis. I was on a visit to my daughter that lives down the mountain, and on my return home I was overtaken by the storm."

Jasper Knight raised the old man in his arms, and carried him into the house, and at once was surrounded by the loungers.

Knight repeated the old fellow's story, when the latter asked for a glass of whisky and requested to be put at once to bed.

As soon as the old man touched the bed he began to groan and show signs of great pain.

Mrs. Dickson came into the room, and being a kind, motherly person, she at once sent her husband down to attend to his customers, saying that she would attend to the necessities of the feeble old man.

The landlord's wife remained with him a few moments, when the old man asked:

"Have you any news concerning your niece?"

Mrs. Dickson answered that she had heard nothing from her.

"Do you think she is dead?"

"Yes; I feel assured that she is dead."

The old man had drawn a pair of spectacles, and had put them on.

A tallow candle had been placed upon a table in the room, and shed a dim, uncertain light about the apartment.

Had Mrs. Dickson been a shrewd and observing woman, she would have noticed that a pair of sharp eyes were watching her—peering over the spectacles, and not through them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"You have given up all hope of seeing her again alive?"

"I have."

The old man beckoned to the woman to approach the bed, and drawing her ear down near to his lips, he said in a knowing manner:

"I do not believe she is dead, Mrs. Dickson."

"But I know that she is dead."

"When did you see her last?"

"About eleven o'clock on the night of her disappearance. But why do you ask me so many questions, old man?"

"Who was that man who brought me in out of the rain?"

"I do not know. I was not down-stairs when you were brought in."

The old man described Jasper Knight, and Mrs. Dickson, recognizing the description, said:

"That man is Jasper Knight."

"Was he a friend of your niece?"

Mrs. Dickson looked at the old man in a sharp and suspicious manner, and asked:

"Who are you?"

"My name is Travis; I am old Travis from over by the Eagle Rock."

"How did you happen to come here to-night?"

"I had been on a visit to my daughter down in the valley, and was on my way home when I was overtaken by the storm."

A few seconds' silence followed his explanation concerning himself, when suddenly he exclaimed:

"I never saw that man Jasper Knight before, but I'll bet he knows something about the disappearance of your niece."

"No, he don't; he of all men knows nothing about it."

A strange smile passed over the old man's face as he heard the reply above quoted.

"I think he does know something," persisted old Travis.

"Your interest in this affair and your suspicions and opinions are very singular, Mr. Travis."

"Well, I'll tell you something, but you must not tell any one."

"You can trust me," answered Mrs. Dickson, as a glance of surprised inquiry came to her face.

"I am an old man, and I can't live very long."

"Oh, you may live many years yet."

"No; but I've a little property; it's all in bonds—Government bonds—and I have not a relative in the world. And I've been looking around for some good worthy person to leave this property to after my death."

"Why, old man, you told me you had a daughter down in the valley, and that you were on your return from a visit to her when you were overtaken by the storm and brought in here?"

"I know I told you that."

"And is it not true?"

"No."

"Why did you tell me such a story? What object did you have?"

"I had an object."

"What was your object?"

"I wanted to come here and make some inquiries about Belle Granger. I did not want any one but you to know my object in coming, so I told that story. I was on my way to the tavern when I fell down exhausted."

"You are a strange old man."

"I told you I had an object in making inquiries about Belle Granger, and now you know my object. I want to make my will, and I want to make sure of her death before I dispose of my property."

"Why do you want to leave your money to Belle Granger?"

"Because she was kind to me; no one knows that I am rich, and every one has treated me with coldness and selfishness. Belle Granger treated me kindly; she taught me how to live and how to die, and, besides, she looked like a daughter I once had, and I meant to leave her my property."

"Had you not better wait before making your will?"

"Why should I wait? I tell you we old people have certain premonitions. I am not long for these mountain scenes, and I must settle all my worldly business at once."

"But the girl may not be dead."

"You said you were sure that she was dead."

"Well, I am not sure."

"There is a chance that she may be living?"

"Yes."

"How shall I find out?"

"I will communicate with you in a few days."

"And will you let me know whether she lives or not?"

"I will."

"Well, I will go to sleep now, and to-morrow we will talk about this matter again."

Mrs. Dickson tucked the bed-clothing about the strange old man, extinguished the candle, and left the room.

The old man lay perfectly still for full half an hour, when he jumped from the bed as nimble as a cat.

His rheumatism had most singularly disappeared.

He sat upon the side of the bed, and in a voice that was not at all shaky with age, he exclaimed:

"Thank Heaven! it's all right."

A moment he sat lost in thought. He had found a dark-lantern whose narrow ray was now shed abroad, and by its light, while still standing on the floor, he repeated:

"It's just as I expected; and the old lady has given herself dead away."

As our readers have already discerned, the pretended feeble old man was the wonderful detective in a new rôle.

Iron Burgess had heard of the disappearance of Belle Granger.

Like Jasper Knight, he had formed a number of theories as to the real cause of her absence.

He had always heard Miss Granger speak in the kindest terms of her aunt, and the theory he gave most credence to was founded on the above fact.

He could not rest until he had fully satisfied himself, and only one road lay open for investigation.

With his usual ingenuity he adopted a fresh disguise, and, as related, penetrated directly into the midst of his enemies.

Iron Burgess was now satisfied that Belle Granger still lived, and that her aunt knew of her whereabouts.

He had forced the old lady to a tacit admission by his skillful questions.

He sat upon the bed, revolving matters in his mind, when he became aware that there was some excitement afloat below-stairs.

The detective was on the alert at once to discover the new cause of excitement, and when he learned what the matter was, he discovered that he had immediate business on hand.

As related, there was quite a number of men gathered in the tavern at the time the groans from the pretended old man were heard, and after the old fellow had been disposed of the card-playing and conversation were resumed.

Suddenly yells were heard without—wild, piercing shrieks that were high above the storm.

The men dropped their cards, and sprung to their feet and listened.

Nearer and nearer came the shrieks, and the men turned pale. All felt assured that something terrible must have happened.

Suddenly the cries were heard just beyond the porch of the tavern, and the next moment a heavy fall was heard on the stoop

Jasper Knight, as before, was the only man who had the courage to open the door and step outside.

The others were paralyzed, so strangely and suddenly had come the piercing shrieks.

As Jasper Knight stepped out upon the porch, he saw a human form extended at full length.

"Who is here, and what is the matter?" he asked.

In an instant the individual, who had lain with his hands covering his head, suddenly leaped to his feet and commenced to shriek again.

Knight recognized the shrieker as a negro who had been employed about one of the distilleries.

"What is the matter with you, Tom?"

"'Fore the Lord, Massa Knight, am dat you?"

"Yes; what is the matter with you? What are you kicking up such a terrible hullabaloo about, you black rascal?"

"'Fore de Lord, sir, ef you had only seed it, yer would be screaming too, yer would."

The men had crowded out from the bar-room.

"What did you see, Tom?"

"De ghost."

"You saw a ghost?"

"Yes, sah."

"Where?"

"Up dar by de gulch."

The gulch was a turn in the mountain road that led between two walls of high rock.

"Now, Tom," said Jasper, "I'll give you just two seconds to tell what you actually saw."

"Dis yere chile were comin' along frough de gulch, when he tought he seed somet'ing white a-bobbin' in and out ahead ob him."

"Was it the ghost of a man or woman?" asked Knight.

"Oh! I'se gwine to tell yer. I tell yer I was a-comin' along, and I seed dis yere white t'ing a-bobbin' in and out ahead ob me. 'Golly!' says I, 'it's jes' 'bout time I seed what dat ar were,' and I hurries up, when—as de Lord am libin', when I come close on to it, I saw it were a woman all in white, and her clothes were wet, and hung roun' her like de hide ob a seal in de water."

"Did you see her face?" asked Jasper, in an excited tone.

"Did I see her face? Yer kin jes' bet I seed her face; and it were Belle Granger's ghost, afore de Lord!"

CHAPTER XIX.

A STRANGE look came over Jasper Knight's face as the negro continued:

"Dis yere chile am a good runner, but, golly! ef dat er ghost didn't jes' fly trough de air like a swallow sailing wid de wind, and in de race I were nowhere."

"How far did the ghost follow you?"

"Golly! I didn't stop ter look; dis yer chile jes' worked his trotters till he came to de tabern, and den he jes' gib out altogether, and dat am de truf."

"Take a whisky, Tom, and let me tell you that you have just been frightened a good heap by your imagination."

Jasper Knight moved over to the card-table, and said:

"Come on, gentlemen; let's finish our game and wait and see what the next excitement will be."

The men sat at the table, and the game was resumed.

Jasper Knight appeared restless and nervous, and lost money rapidly.

At length he rose from the table, and said:

"I'm done, and I reckon I'll go home."

"Going home in this storm, Knight?" asked Dickson, in surprise.

"Yes."

"What can take you home such a night? We can give you a bed, I reckon."

"I must go home. The old man is not well, and some one must sit up with him for the rest of the night."

Without further words, Knight passed out, amid the wondering remarks of his companions.

Strangely enough, Jasper Knight did not take the road that led toward his home, but followed the road that led toward the gulch where nigger Tom had said he had seen the ghost.

As stated, Iron Burgess had heard the yells of Black Tom, and had learned that something exciting was in progress down in the bar-room.

The detective opened his door and stole from his room. He moved along quite nimbly for an old man, and his tread was noiseless.

The detective was down in the hall off from the bar-room, and had his ear to the key-hole while Jasper Knight was cross-examining Tom, the frightened negro.

Burgess was as strangely agitated as Jasper Knight had been when he heard the negro's narrative.

He stole back to his room, and, in the words of the great Roman, muttered:

"The die is cast. I will be compelled to let them think that two ghosts are stalking abroad."

Burgess resumed the outer clothing that had been removed when he was placed on the bed, and soon succeeded in letting himself down from the window to the ground.

The detective made his way toward the gulch.

Jasper Knight also reached the gulch.

The man felt assured now that Belle Granger still lived, and was wandering about in the fierce storm.

As he reached the gulch he saw a sight that, for a moment, sent a thrill of terror through him.

A strange light pierced the darkness and flitted along the damp, muddy road.

Knight, for an instant, felt that, after all, the negro might have seen something more than ordinary. He was not a man, however, to flinch.

He came to a halt, and watched, and, a moment later, the mystery of the flitting light was explained.

He saw that the light shone out steadily from a point about three feet above the ground.

Knight stole forward, and soon gained a full explanation.

The flitting mystery was a dark-lantern held in a man's hand.

Who on earth the man could be, Knight could not conceive; but he was not a man to remain long in doubt.

Boldly he advanced, and proceeded near enough to recognize the outlines of a man's form.

"Hold! who is there?" asked Knight.

"Who challenges?" came the quick response, and the light was extinguished.

"Respond, or I'll fire!" called Knight.

Still no answer.

Knight advanced close to the stranger; in fact, so close that he recognized the old man whom he had carried into the tavern.

Like a revelation the strange truth flashed through his mind.

"Blakie, is that you?"

Still no answer.

"Whoever you may be, answer or I fire."

At length there came an answer.

"Fire, if you see fit."

Jasper Knight did fire.

Iron Burgess had taken no pains to disguise his voice. Knight had recognized him, and blazed away. The next moment Knight felt himself grasped in a powerful pair of arms.

The struggle was but a brief one.

Large and strong as Jasper Knight was, he was no match for the iron-muscled detective.

Knight was thrown down on the wet road; a powerful hand gripped his wrists, and a strong knee pressed upon his chest.

"I've got you, Jasper!" said the detective.

"Do your worst."

"You were a good friend to me, Knight."

"I merely wiped out an obligation. I am not asking for mercy."

"I am not after a man who has once been a friend. Get up, but, remember, I've spared you."

"I'll never raise my hand against you again, Blakie. Accounts are closed between you and me."

"What brought you out in the storm?" asked Burgess.

Knight rose to his feet and made a strange reply.

"It seems," he said, "that I came out to act as an aid to you."

"I do not understand you."

"I came out to find the ghost."

"Well?"

"The ghost was Belle Granger in the flesh."

"So I believe."

"Had I found her, it would have been for your benefit."

"How for my benefit?"

"I am satisfied," said Jasper Knight, "that the girl loves you."

"And you love the girl?" said Iron Burgess.

"I did love her, but I am ready to stand aside."

An incredulous look came into the detective's face. He evidently did not take much stock in Jasper Knight's sudden disinterestedness.

"You have a perfect right to woo the girl, and win her, if you can."

"We will drop the subject. Belle Granger will never be anything more to me than a friend; you may believe me or not, just as you choose. I am asking no odds at your hands. My life is at your mercy."

"You will never come to harm through me, Jasper Knight."

"All right. I owe you my life. I do not ask it from you."

"As a friend you will never let any one know that you have met me?"

"I shall never mention our meeting."

"You will not let it be known that I am not the victim of Peter?"

"I will not."

"I have your word of honor?"

"You have."

"Put your hand there, Knight, and may you and I never meet again unless it is under circumstances where we can be friends with nothing to come between us."

Without a word more the two strange men separated.

Jasper Knight proceeded to his home, and Iron Burgess continued his search for the ghost.

It was some time before he struck a trail, but at length he came across a little sign that would not have attracted a less acute and well-trained man.

The storm had begun to abate, and the detective followed the trail for a long distance.

Fully an hour he had been tramping over the mountain road, when suddenly he came to a spot where the trail was lost and where two roads diverged.

CHAPTER XX.

IN the meantime, Iron Burgess had continued his search for the trail of the ghost.

Daylight found him still in the mountains, on the search.

At length, tired and wearied, he sat down to rest and partake of some of the cold lunch he had brought with him. The detective had just finished his repast and was settling down for a short nap, when he heard the report of a gun.

In a moment he was upon his feet and hastening in the direction whence the gun-shot came.

Through brush and brier he plunged, when at length he came upon the figure of a man.

One glance was sufficient. Peter, the giant negro, stood before him.

"Halloo, you black rascal! Are you up to your old tricks?"

"No, no, massa; I jes' fired dis yere ole gun to scare something."

"What did you want to scare?"

"A ghost."

"Where did you see the ghost, Peter?"

"Right ober dar."

The negro pointed to a path that led up a steep acclivity.

"Well, come, Peter, you help me to find that ghost and I will give you the double-barreled shot-gun that Smith failed to provide you with."

Peter and the detective started upon the trail of the ghost.

They found several trails, and followed them up without gaining any satisfactory result.

As the shadows began to lengthen, Peter remarked, with a yawn, as the two men sat down for a moment's rest:

"I know dat ar ghost ain't easy to catch."

"You say 'dat ar' ghost. Why do you allude particularly to 'dat ar' ghost?"

"Kase dis yere chile hab chased dat ar ghost afore."

"What!" ejaculated the detective, now more amazed than ever.

"Yes, sah; dis chile hab chased dat ar ghost a dozen times afore to day."

"When did you first see it?"

"'Bout four months ago."

"How do you know it was four months ago?"

"Kase der were snow on de ground, and I tracked it like a rabbit."

"Now I know you are making up this whole story, you black rascal."

"No, sah; I'se tellin' de trufe, de whole trufe, and nothing but de trufe."

"And you say the ghost made tracks in the snow?"

"Yes, sah."

"Who ever heard of a shadow making a track?"

"Don't know nuffin' 'bout dat ar, but dis yere chile am gwine to swear dat he saw dat ar ghost 'bout four months ago."

Iron Burgess was compelled to believe that the negro was telling the truth.

The shrewd man had never been more mystified in his life.

There was reason to believe that Belle Granger was wandering about the mountain, but no reason to believe that she had been four months previously.

* * * * *

As stated in a previous chapter, the hour was approaching when the detective would be prepared to make his grand "closing in" move.

Already he had a list of the names and the description of the persons of over twenty men against whom indictments had been found for murder, illicit trade in contraband whisky, and resistance to Government officers.

The detective knew enough of human nature to decide that Peter had told the truth concerning the singular apparition that had been flitting about the mountain roads.

If Peter had seen the ghost four months previously, it could not be Belle Granger.

Our hero remembered that the negro who had startled the tavern loungers with his story, had positively stated that it was Belle Granger's face that he had seen.

It was easy to account, however, for the frightened fellow's mistake.

He had heard about the girl's death, and, coming of a superstitious race, the meeting, under extraordinary circumstances, with any woman, would have fixed upon his imagination the features of the tavern-keeper's niece.

Our hero made up his mind to give up the ghost chase, and started to make his way to the cavern distillery.

He had got wind of the fact that there was to be a meeting of the distillers from about the whole region.

They were in the habit of meeting at stated intervals for the purpose of banding together for mutual protection in their illicit traffic.

Iron Burgess, however, was destined to encounter a strange adventure before reaching the cavern distillery.

He was proceeding along a mule path, when suddenly he was startled by hearing a rustle in the brush ahead of him.

At once he drew his revolver, and prepared for hot work. The detective advanced upon the spot where he had heard the noise, when suddenly once more he heard the rustle. Still carrying his pistol in his hand, he darted into the bushes.

An exclamation of amazement fell from his lips, and for an instant he lost all physical power.

As he had darted into the brush, a figure in white had darted out.

It was the figure of a woman.

It was a clear moonlight night, the storm of the previous evening had emptied the clouds, and not even a mist obscured the silver rays of the moon.

Long, golden hair streamed down the woman's back.

Not for an instant did the sensible, iron-nerved detective entertain the idea of a ghost.

It was flesh and blood that he was chasing, and he knew it.

The girl sped along at lightning-like speed, and really got over the ground and through the undergrowth as quickly as our hero.

The pursuit continued for some minutes, when the flying figure in white emerged from the brush and went shooting across an open space.

Alas! Iron Burgess felt his blood congeal in his veins.

He knew the spot well, and the girl was flying directly toward the verge of a precipice that bordered a glen two hundred feet below.

What the detective feared was that the poor creature in her fright would dash right over the declivity.

To go over that fearful abyss was certain death.

Burgess was a quick thinker, and at once he came to a halt.

The girl or woman had turned her head several times to glance at her pursuer, and the latter hoped that she would turn once more and observe that he had come to a halt.

His hope was that when she saw that he had ceased to pursue her she would slacken her pace and discover her danger.

She rushed madly on, and Burgess was just preparing to call out to her when she reached the verge of the precipice and came to a halt.

As she halted she turned round and saw that her pursuer had given up the chase for the moment.

He started to go toward her, when the girl waved him back, and he felt forced to come to a halt.

He had advanced but a few steps, and yet he strained his eyes to identify the thrilling apparition.

Once more he moved forward, and again the apparition waved him back.

This time the detective determined to pay no heed to the warning signal, and continued to advance, when suddenly the girl made one step nearer to the edge of the cliff.

Burgess still advanced, and the girl, in a most significant manner, pointed over the chasm, and made a movement that plainly warned him that if he advanced she would throw herself over.

The detective was compelled once more to come to a halt.

He was a patient man, and resolved to retire and ponder over some plan for securing possession of the strange creature.

He had sufficient experience to know that the signals indicating her determination to throw herself over were no idle threats.

Despite the testimony of Peter, Iron Burgess was now assured that he was gazing upon the form of Belle Granger.

The conclusion he had reached was that the great excitements and troubles through which she had passed had driven her demented.

The detective retired within the shadow of the trees.

Right at the edge of the line of trees he came to a halt.

The girl stood and watched, and it appeared as though the man had become as fixed in his position under the shadow of the trees as the girl over the verge of the cliff.

The man, however, was not there.

The ever-ready detective had resorted to a very cunning trick to deceive the crazed girl.

Before reappearing upon the open ground he had prepared for a little ruse.

His hat and coat were left to the girl's view, but the man had slipped from under the one and out of the other.

Distance and the uncertain light of the moon aided a deception that could not have been practiced under the broad glare of sunlight.

Having left his hat and coat as a decoy, the detective dropped upon his hands and knees, and crept through the brush to see how his little scheme was working.

He found the girl standing with her eyes fixed upon the hat and coat.

His scheme had worked well.

Burgess, as our readers will remember, was well acquainted all over the mountains, and his knowledge served him well upon the occasion of which we write.

As soon as he made sure that the girl was deceived by his hat and coat, he entered the forest and proceeded around to one side, and then walked straight toward the cliff until he was on a line with the girl.

Crawling to the verge of the woods once more, he saw that there she stood, still watching with intense interest the deceiving hat and coat.

"She is mine now, sure!" exclaimed the subtle man, as he approached the chasm verge and lowered himself over to a lower ledge.

The most difficult part of his plan now confronted him.

His purpose was to steal along the lower ledge until he arrived abreast of the girl, when it was his intention to suddenly confront her and intervene between her and the cliff.

Steadily he moved along until he reached a point within twenty feet of where the girl stood.

The perilous moment had arrived. The starting of a stone would alarm the demented girl and cause her to make the fatal plunge down the chasm.

The man could not see whether she stood there or not. He was under the cliff.

Stealthily and cautiously he advanced.

His progress was slow but sure, and at length he reached a point directly opposite to where she had stood.

Burgess ventured to raise his head and peep over the cliff.

There the strange creature still stood with her eyes fixed upon the hat.

The moment had arrived for him to make his last grand movement.

On its success depended a life.

He had selected a favorable spot and had placed his hands in position to make the spring that would bring him up upon the cliff's bank before the girl.

Alas! at the very last moment a most unexpected and singular accident occurred.

A piece of the crumbling stone became loosened, and with a loud noise went crashing down the face of the rocks beneath.

CHAPTER XXI.

"HEAVENS!" ejaculated the detective, as he dropped back and hid himself under the shelving rock.

A moment of fearful silence followed.

The man stood perfectly still.

He had become a statue, as far as standing in a motionless position was concerned.

At length he cautiously peeped out and ventured further and further, until once more he attempted to climb up over the ledge.

The moment his head had passed above the soil level he saw that he had been beaten at his own game.

The girl had disappeared.

It was with considerable chagrin that the detective crawled up on the bank and walked over to where his hat and coat still hung as a decoy.

Putting on his clothing, he started to hunt the trail once more.

The detective searched long for the trail, but could not discover the least trace of the missing girl.

He resolved to pay a visit to Mrs. Dickson.

In the meantime, the parties who had been scouting through the mountains had all returned but one.

It was early morning following the day and night during which the scenes we have described occurred.

The different parties had been furnished with refreshment, and were sitting out on the tumble-down piazza of the tavern, discussing the night's adventures.

Jasper Knight was among them, although he had not joined any of the searching parties.

While the men were talking, Mrs. Dickson came from the tavern and walked away up the road.

The good woman was going to visit a woman who did sewing for those ladies in the mountain who were able to indulge in the luxury of having their sewing done for them.

The tavern-keeper's wife had not gone two hundred yards, when a negro, who had been standing in the midst of the little group of excited men, stole off and took the same direction followed by the woman.

He stole along after Mrs. Dickson, keeping her in sight until she turned off from the main road and followed a path leading through the woods, when he increased his pace and ran rapidly after her.

Mrs. Dickson heard rapid steps behind her, and, turning, saw the negro.

"Hold on dar, missus!" cried the negro; and the woman came to a halt.

"Who are you, and where do you belong?"

"My name is William, Mrs. Dickson, and dis yere chile b'longs ober in Clairville."

"What brought you over to this side of the mountain?"

"I want ter get de reward dat hab been offered."

"Reward for what?"

"For de findin' ob Miss Belle Granger;" and the negro drew near to the tavern-keeper's wife and lowered his voice to a confidential tone.

Mrs. Dickson glared at the negro in amazement as she exclaimed:

"What do you know about any missing girl?"

"I tell yer, missus, dis yere chile hab got good news 'bout dat ar gal."

"Well, tell me your news."

"Want de reward fust."

"How much reward do you want?"

"Fifty dollars."

"Tell me your news, and if it is worth fifty dollars, I will pay you the money."

"De gal am runnin' round de mountain, missus, and everybody what sees it t'inks it am a ghost."

"Did you ever see Miss Granger?"

"Yes, missus."

"Where?"

"At de tavern."

"And you have seen this ghost?"

"Yes, missus."

"And it was Miss Granger, the young lady whom you have seen around the tavern?"

"Shuah."

"Well, William, let me tell you that you had better be very careful."

"'Bout what, missus?"

"About that ghost."

"Golly! it ain't no ghost."

"Yes, it is a ghost."

"How do you know, missus?"

"I do know, and I tell you that any time you see that ghost, you had better run away from it."

"Don't yer want dis yere chile to cotch it?"

"No; but I want you to look out for yourself."

"Dat de ghost don't cotch me?"

"Exactly."

"See here, missus, I see dat you don't t'ink what I say am worf fifty dollars."

"Not one penny. I knew before all you have told me."

"Dis yere chile am out an' injured, dat am shuah."

"How are you out and injured?"

"I'se been follerin' dat ghost all aroun' de mountain."

"You had better not follow it any more."

"Yes, I'se boun' to foller it now."

"Why?"

"To get squar, missus. I ain't afraid ob no ghost; and dat ar one hab beat me out ob fifty dollars, and dis yere chile am gwine ter lay dat ar ghost."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh! I'se jes' gwine to lay dat ar ghost, dat am all."

"You must let that ghost alone."

"No, missus; I'se jes' gwine ter drop it; no ghost ain't gwine ter fool dis yere chile."

"How are you going to drop it?"

"I'se got a gun, and I'se gwine ter lay dat ar ghost."

Mrs. Dickson began to show signs of great anxiety as she said:

"Mind me, William, you shoot that ghost and you will be hung."

"Golly! can't hang nobody for shootin' a ghost, missus."

"But it may not be a ghost."

"I'se jes' gwine ter find out."

"William, I do not wish you to pay any further attention to that ghost."

"Yer don't want dis yere chile to cotch it for yer?"

"No."

"It am bad to lose fifty dollars; but it am all right."

"If you see the ghost again, William, come and tell me all about it, and say nothing to any one else, and I will give you ten dollars."

"T'ank yer, missus; I'se boun' ter come and tell yer somet'ing 'bout dat ar ghost, kase I'se shuah to see it again."

Mrs. Dickson exchanged a few more words with her new friend, and started upon her way.

In the meantime, the negro returned to the main road and took a course that did not lead him toward either Clairville or the mountain.

William, as the fellow had called himself, had proceeded some distance, and was passing through the gulch road, when suddenly he was confronted by a dozen men.

One of the party was mounted on horseback and held a coiled rope over his arm.

The negro had been ambushed and was surrounded before he knew what was about to occur.

The moment the men sprung upon the colored man a most tragic scene ensued.

They had expected to meet with no resistance, and were unprepared at the moment.

One man leaped forward and caught the negro from behind, when the latter broke loose, leaving the check shirt in the hands of the man who had seized him.

A most thrilling and startling revelation was the result.

A white body below the shoulders was revealed.

The pretended negro was a white man.

In the meantime, the latter had been busy.

He was in a critical position, and he was just the man to get out of it.

His assailants were scattered in every direction, as the detective leaped forward and knocked the mounted man from his horse.

In a moment our hero was on the horse, and urging the animal forward, he rode right through the men.

The latter had recovered from their first surprise, and a perfect shower of bullets rattled around the fleeing man; but away he sped, and was soon beyond range.

The men came together in the center of the road.

A moment the men stood and gazed into one another's faces in blank amazement.

At length one of them broke the silence with the remark:

"It was Blakie."

The response came in mournful tones as a confirming rejoinder:

"*It was* Blakie."

A messenger was dispatched to the tavern.

The latter arrived breathless and exhausted, and he had a wonderful story to tell.

The man made the strange and startling revelation:

"The nigger was Blakie stained up."

"Aha!" yelled Dickson. "What did I tell you, men?"

The man told the story of the wonderful escape, and all hands started for the gulch.

Jasper Knight was among those who remained at the tavern.

He was joined by several other distillers.

The latter were an incensed body of desperate men.

For over ten days, owing to the presence of the detective, they had been afraid to run their factories.

The stoppage was ruining them.

One of them remarked to Knight:

"Things have come to a desperate pass."

"So desperate," answered Knight, "that I for one will emigrate."

"But your interest in the still?"

"I've closed that out. I tell you, gentlemen, you might as well make up your minds that the jig is up. Blakie will close in on all of us."

A man who had been standing near stepped forward at that moment, and said:

"Gentlemen, you can take matters cool. I'll have half a dozen men of the right sort here before night."

The speaker was a wild, desperate-looking man, with straight black hair hanging down under his slouched hat.

His eyes were jet black, and his complexion dark, showing plainly that he had either negro or Indian blood in his veins.

CHAPTER XXII.

SOME of the distillers had not been idle.

They had determined to fight fire with fire, and had imported from the Far West a desperate character with a number of his men to serve as a special force against Government agents.

The man was known as Black Bill, and being already an outlaw, it made little difference to him whether or not he added a few more crimes to the long list already to his credit

Black Bill lounged around until night, when he started off by the road, where, at a given point, he met three other men as wild and desperate-looking as himself.

The four men held a long consultation.

As they walked away a fifth man rose from a cover where he had been crouching, and also moved off through the gulch road.

As the latter moved away, he muttered:

"So they've got Black Bill to run out Iron Burgess, eh? Well, I wish him luck; but it's my opinion that Bill's career is nearing its end."

In the meantime, the detective, after his escape from the ambush party, had galloped away until he was far beyond the probability of pursuit, when he dismounted from the horse, and starting the animal loose, struck into the hills.

The horse had returned to the tavern, only to add to the mystery that surrounded the man who had so recently ridden him.

It was afternoon when Burgess reached a cavern far back in the mountains.

Seated at the entrance to the cavern was the negro Mose.

The latter, upon recognizing the presence of a new-comer, leaped to his feet and demanded:

"Who comes there?"

The next instant our hero broke through a circle of brush.

He presented a strange, weird sight.

His face was black, but his whole body gleamed under the sun.

Mose tumbled to the identity of the new-comer, and hastened to join him.

"Golly, massa, what hab yer been up to dis yere time?"

Burgess had no explanation to make, but started toward the cavern entrance.

He was met by a white man.

"Halloo, Al!" called the latter, "you have seen service?"

The detective shook hands with his friend Ingersol—the man whose life he had saved—and then passed into the cavern.

Mose set about getting up a meal, and had quite a savory dish by the time the detective reappeared after, by a method known to himself, having removed the black stains.

Tom Ingersol and our hero held a long talk after the meal, when the latter settled down for a sleep, ordering that he should be awakened an hour before dark.

Tom Ingersol had fully recovered from his wound, and expressed himself as fully capable of taking a hand in the grand move that was to be made against the distillers.

Burgess, however, had told him that he was still too weak, and must not think of such a thing.

Mose awakened the detective an hour before sundown, when the latter left a few directions as to what should be done under certain contingencies, and once more disappeared in the brush.

It was still early in the evening when the detective appeared at a certain point in the mountains near the place where the cavern distillery was located.

He was evidently on the watch for some person, and had lain in waiting for half an hour, when he suddenly bent his ear and listened.

He had heard a step, and after listening a moment, he commenced to crawl along toward the point whence the sound of steps had come.

He held a cocked pistol in his hand as he crawled forward.

The detective had crawled but a short distance, when he came to the verge of an opening in the brush, and his glance rested upon the figure of a man.

He made up his mind to lay low and watch the other chap a bit; and he had not been waiting long before he became aware that the other chap was also on the lay low and on the lookout for some one.

The man at length stole forward through the brush, and he moved in such a noiseless manner that our hero was led to believe that the fellow was an expert at the hide-and-seek business.

The detective crept after the man, and finally lost sight of him.

"I'll be hanged," muttered Burgess, after glancing around in every direction, "if I can form any idea as to where that chap has disappeared. Maybe I've been tracking another ghost."

The detective resolved to creep around and learn whether or not he could find the trail of the man he had been watching.

He had crawled for some distance, and had extended his hand to draw himself forward, when his touch fell upon a human form.

A struggle followed.

Both men proved themselves to be strong and powerful, and neither made the least outcry.

The detective at length succeeded in pinioning his man to the ground, when in a low whisper he asked:

"Who are you, Mister Man?"

"Speak louder," said the man.

Burgess exclaimed, in quite a distinct tone:

"Who the devil are you?"

"Thank Heaven!" came the still more singular answer.

"What are you thanking Heaven for, my friend?"

"Let up on me a bit, and I'll tell you."

The man spoke in a tone as loud and distinct as our hero's, when Burgess exclaimed:

"By all that's strange! I reckon I know that voice."

"It would be strange if you didn't."

"Is it you, Bayle Ward?"

"That's my name, Al Burgess."

"By ginger, man!" cried the detective, as he raised himself from off the body of the man he had overcome; "it's my turn to thank Heaven."

An instant later the two men, who a moment before had been struggling in a deadly embrace, were cordially shaking hands.

Our readers will remember that Iron Burgess had been making his arrangements for closing in on the whisky men.

He had been waiting a number of days to be joined by a body of men who were to aid him in making arrests at the last moment.

The man Bayle Ward was a noted detective in the Government's employ, and had been dispatched with others to assist Burgess in any manner that the latter should desire.

After the men had exchanged greetings, they proceeded in a business-like manner to discuss the situation.

The Iron Detective related all that had occurred since his advent among the mountains, and when he had finished, Bayle Ward said:

"It's lucky you are ready to close in."

"Why?"

"They have imported a man who is to do the business for you."

"Who?"

"A fellow named Black Bill."

"Aha! I know him—a Missourian?"

"That is the man."

Bayle Ward was the stranger who had been standing by when the conversation between Black Bill and Jasper Knight had taken place.

The detective had stood quietly by, taking Bill's measure, and it was the same man who had been lurking near when Bill and his three comrades held their consultation.

Ward had fallen upon the trail of these men, knowing that should they come upon Burgess, he would be on hand, also ready to take a hand in any little scrimmage that might chance to be started.

It was while dogging Black Bill and his men that he had been discovered and recognized by his friend, Iron Burgess, the Government Detective.

"Black Bill was the man you were laying low on when I came across you?"

"Yes."

"Then the fellow who is going to run me out must be somewhere in this vicinity?"

"He was not far off when I took to cover right here."

Even while the detectives were talking, they heard sounds announcing the approach of some one.

"Lay low!" cried Burgess, and the two men dropped to the turf.

A few moments passed.

The sounds had ceased, and our hero and his companion were preparing to leave cover again when they were halted by hearing voices.

"It's Bill and his party," said Ward.

"They're right upon us," rejoined Burgess.

The latter had spoken truly. Black Bill and his party had come to a halt within a few feet of where the two detectives stood.

"Well, lads, we've had a pretty good tramp without coming upon our game," said Bill.

"I reckon he's had wind of our coming and concluded it was time to leave."

"It would be the happiest moment of my life were I to meet him."

"I'd like to see you brought to the test."

At that moment there came a voice, saying:

"How much would you give to see Bill brought to the test?"

The four men started and gazed in one another's faces.

After a moment, Bill asked in a shaky sort of voice:

"Who spoke?"

"I'll be hanged if I know!" answered the man who had been chaffing him.

"You lads are putting up some game on me."

All three of Bill's companions protested that they had not spoken one word.

"Then, by Heaven! there's some one laying in the brush."

Bill and his party were old woodsmen, and at once dropped to cover.

They had no notion of being dropped without a chance for a back cut.

There were two parties on the lay low.

Burgess and his companion lay in one cover, and Black Bill and his friends lay in another.

All hands were brave and experienced men and ready at a moment's warning any time for a scrimmage.

The men lay for some time without either party making a move.

At length Burgess said:

"It won't do, Bayle, to lie here and lose time."

"What shall we do? Come the slide around on them?"

"No."

"How will you have it?"

"I'll show you," said Burgess; and rising to his feet, he called out: "Halloo, over there!"

"Halloo!" came back.

"Who are you?"

"Who are you?" came the answer back.

"I reckon I'm the man Black Bill is looking for," was the defiant reply that fell from our hero.

It was some moments before an answer came, when Black Bill called out:

"Are you open for a friendly parley?"

"I am open," was the response.

Burgess had merely told his friend to lay low, and had given him no other directions.

The fact was, Bayle Ward was not a man who needed minute orders; at a critical moment he knew pretty well how to act on his own account.

Black Bill and his party, seeing only one man standing out to confront them, advanced boldly with their leader at their head.

When close to the detective, the party came to a halt, and Bill asked:

"Who may you be, stranger?"

"The man you have been looking for, I reckon."

"What man am I looking for?"

"You ought to know; you're leading the hunt."

"By what name may you call yourself?"

"I am known as Blakie around here."

An involuntary exclamation of surprise burst from the lips of all the men upon hearing this bold declaration.

"You're Blakie, eh?"

"That's the name I go by around here."

"And you are the chap the Government has sent down here to clean out the whisky men?"

"Well, it's a part of my business down here to find out a thing or two on my own account."

"See here, let you and I chip in; I've no call with the mooners."

"Well, you are the biggest bubble I ever struck!" and as Burgess spoke, he suddenly drew off, and with one powerful blow of his fist he sent Bill sprawling.

Six men rushed upon the scene.

One glance was sufficient for Blakie. The new-comers were mooners.

Burgess leaped back and was covered by the brush.

The scouters came up, asking:

"Who was that man?"

"He called himself Blakie," was the answer.

"Now we've got him!" cried the leader of the scouters.

With a wild shout the mooners all made a dash into the thicket.

Iron Burgess and Bayle Ward had dashed away the moment he had struck Black Bill.

They heard the savage yell, as the mooners, in company with Bill's crowd, took to the brush.

The mooners were heard for a few seconds dashing through the brush, and then all sounds ceased.

Burgess did not understand the turn the affair had taken.

He and his partner Ward came to a halt.

"When did you expect your men?"

"Not till morning."

"Then it could not have been them."

"It is possible that it may have been; they may have come ahead of time."

At that moment a step was heard.

The two detectives had been standing on the verge of an opening in the wood when the conversation above recorded occurred.

"Some one comes this way—lay low!" said Burgess.

A step was heard moving through the brush on the opposite side of the opening, but as the party neared the clearing the step ceased.

"It may be one of your men, Ward."

"We will find out."

Both men crept around the edge of the clearing, and once across, moved down toward the point where they had heard the noise.

They saw a human form dodge behind a tree.

Burgess darted forward, and when he saw the man, exclaimed:

"Heavens, Mose! is that you?"

"Yes, sah; dat am dis chile, shuah."

CHAPTER XXIII.

"WHAT brought you dodging through the woods, man?"

"I were lookin' for him, Massa Blakie."

"Looking for whom?"

"Massa Ingersol."

"Looking for Tom Ingersol?"

"Yes, sah."

"What were you looking for him down here for, you fool?"

"He got away, sah."

An idea shot through Blakie's mind.

"He followed me, eh?"

"Yes, sah."

"How soon did he start after I left the cavern?"

"Ten minutes later, sah."

"Bayle, it's a friend of mine who has dropped down on us."

"Then the chances are your friend has been dropped by this time."

"We will find out."

"That's my idea."

The two detectives retraced their steps.

Burgess told Moses to remain where he was until he received further orders.

Iron Burgess and his friend had not gone far when they were convinced that something extraordinary was going on.

They had returned to the spot where Burgess had encountered Black Bill.

A thrilling sight met their gaze.

The men had kindled a great blazing fire, and by its glare Burgess recognized his friend Ingersol.

The latter was bound hand and foot.

The purpose of the mooners was apparent.

They had determined to hang their prisoner.

Iron Burgess did not hesitate an instant as to his course.

The rope had already been thrown over a tree, and had been adjusted around the victim's neck.

Bang! went a rifle.

The men dropped their hold upon the rope, and indeed all hands scampered to cover.

The doomed man ran toward the point whence the shot had come, dragging the rope with him, fastened as it was about his neck.

His hands were bound behind him, and he could not release himself.

He had walked but a few steps when he fell.

Another danger threatened him, as the rope had caught, and the fall tightened it so that he was strangling.

Only a moment, however, was he in the latter peril.

Burgess had crawled forward and had cut the rope, as also the thongs that bound his friend's hands.

The two men crawled toward cover.

Burgess and Ingersol reached cover in safety, when the former said:

"How did you get into that scrape?"

"I had a narrow squeak of it, didn't I?" replied Ingersol.

"It's time for us to get away from here," said Burgess.

The three detectives moved away.

Burgess had made up his mind that it was a good time to carry out a certain scheme he had on hand.

The detectives soon became aware that they were being followed.

The whisky men were closing upon them rapidly.

Indeed, the three detectives soon became aware that they were in a circle of foes.

They managed to get outside the limits of the circle, and soon had all their enemies in their rear.

They had gone but a few steps, however, when they came upon another party.

The last party fell back from cover to cover.

"By all that's strange," exclaimed Bayle Ward, "I believe this last party are our friends."

"Lucky for us if it is," answered Burgess; "otherwise we're gone, as the mountains are full of the whisky men, and they are bound to have us in the end."

"Three men can not stand against a hundred, that's sure," returned Ward.

The latter put his fingers to his lips and made a peculiar noise.

An instant later a similar noise came from the direction of the retreating men.

"It's all right," cried Ward; "they are our fellows."

The men had stopped retreating, and the detectives advanced.

One of the men stood still, and when Burgess and his party were close to him he challenged:

"Who comes there?"

Bayle Ward answered by calling a man's name.

In an instant a dozen men sprung from the ground and approached.

Indeed, it was the party Burgess had been expecting for so many days.

The new-comers were all detectives, and brave, experienced men.

They were all ready for a regular campaign.

But a few seconds were spent in greeting, as Burgess remarked:

"We are ready for them now, and the devils are at hand."

CHAPTER XXIV.

INDEED, the mooners were pressing forward.

"Now we will stop and give them a dose," said Ingersol.

The latter appeared anxious only for fight.

Burgess, however, had another game to play.

It was just midnight, and he wanted to close in on all his work before another sun shone.

The party of detectives moved as silently as possible through the woods.

The pursuers were heard in their rear at times.

Burgess led his party until they came to a main road, and soon he reached the place where, as described in a former chapter, large quantities of whisky were stored.

The detective left the road and advanced along the edge of the cliff toward the great storage house.

They soon reached the place.

Burgess revealed his plan.

The fire fiend was to be let loose.

A number of dark figures were to be seen running hither and thither for a few moments, when soon a glare of light burst out in several directions.

Burgess had sent a number of his men ahead, under the command of Ingersol, to act as firebugs, and building after building was fired.

Soon the men reached the entrance to the cavern still where millions of gallons of the illicit liquor had been manufactured.

The whisky men had gathered in force at the entrance.

The faces of the latter were distorted with delight under the glare of the flames.

As, with their weapons at a cock, they danced around before that cavern entrance, through which gleamed the lurid glare of the burning stills, they looked like so many demons.

Their delight arose from the belief that they had caught the law-officers in their own trap.

The wretches had prepared for such an emergency.

The still had been undermined, and some of the mooners at that very moment were placing powder in position.

Little did the detectives dream that they were walking over death.

One of them, however, appeared to know what he was about.

Iron Burgess, having fired the stills, called his men off, and led them through the secret entrance.

Suddenly a red glare was seen coming from the direction of the surface distilleries.

The distillers saw, and were dismayed.

They were now a wild and maddened set of men.

Prospective ruin had frenzied them, and neither fear nor any other sense could now act as a restraint upon them.

They were ready to fight and die around their smoldering buildings.

* * * * * *

When day dawned the whisky business in that particular section was ruined forever.

Burgess knew well that the whisky men could never recover from the terrible blow he had dealt them.

He had swept over the country like a besom of destruction, and had scattered ruin—financial ruin—on every side.

Ere noon of that day, the detectives who had joined our hero were on their way with their prisoners to a city where a United States Court existed.

The detective did not go with his men and their prisoners.

Having done the Government work so well, he remained to work out a little private matter of his own.

A large crowd of men were gathered at the tavern.

They were a desperate set of individuals.

They had been bold and reckless men, and had lived in open defiance of all law, but at length had been crushed by an humble agent of the law.

They were desperate, but crestfallen.

The detectives had disappeared as suddenly and as strangely as they had appeared.

Like a swollen stream that carries destruction through the night and subsides into a rivulet with the coming of the day, so had the detectives swept through that region.

Jasper Knight was the only man among that wild and excited crowd of men who was not wild with anger and chagrin.

Jasper had made up his mind that Iron Burgess would not fail, and he had disposed of all his interests in the business before the fearful night of destruction.

That black morning to the moonshiners did not find him a loser.

A man approached Knight, and said:

"You got out just in time."

"I did."

"You had warning of what was to come, Knight?"

"I had no more warning than any other man around here. I had seen enough of Blakie, as you all had, to know that he was not one of those men who make failures."

"The Government will have to pay for all this loss of property."

"Who will the Government pay?"

"The men who have suffered, of course."

"Who dares go and claim his losses?"

"Suppose a man should do so?"

"That would be a confession as to his illicit dealings."

"All right. Suppose a man had to go to prison, he could recover damages for the benefit of his family."

"Could he?"

"Of course he could."

"Listen to me, my friend. The Government would offset any judgment with a claim for back tax due, and send you to jail or hang you, all the same."

"That Blakie is the devil incarnate."

"He just weighed all the chances, you can just bet, before he fired all those buildings and destroyed all the spirits; and my advice to the men around here is to pocket their losses and say nothing about them."

"We'll catch Blakie yet."

"You will?"

"We will."

"When?"

"Before night."

"Do you suppose he will lay around here after what has occurred?"

"He is laying around here."

"How do you know?"

"He was seen in the mountains."

"Who saw him?"

"A woman."

"He has left by this time."

"No, sir; and we'll have him sure, and the devil help him!"

"Well, the devil, or some one equally powerful, has been helping him. He has defied you all, and you'll never get satisfaction, you can make up your minds."

At the time the above conversation occurred it was not known that the arrests had been made.

A man came in and announced one arrest, and curses filled the air.

Within an hour it was known that seven prominent men had most mysteriously disappeared.

Those who remained began to shake in their shoes. It looked as though for a verity the day of judgment had come.

Consternation prevailed on every side.

Night fell, and Jasper Knight started to go to his home.

It chanced to be a clear, starlight evening, and the ex-distiller was walking along a lonely road, when he espied a human figure seated beside it.

Upon coming within a few feet of the man, Knight said:

"Good-evening, stranger."

"Good-evening," came the reply.

Knight gave a start. He recognized that voice.

"Blakie, is it you?"

"Yes."

"And you still linger around this region?"

"I was waiting for you."

"How did you know I came this way?"

"I reckon the people around here ought to be convinced that I know a great many things they little suspected."

"You have business with me?"

"No; I've a favor to ask."

"I'll do you any favor I can."

"I wish to meet Mrs. Dickson."

"And you want me to communicate with her?"

"Yes."

"I'll do so."

"I want you to tell Mrs. Dickson that Iron Burgess will visit her this night."

CHAPTER XXV.

JASPER KNIGHT could not realize that he had heard aright.

"When do you propose meeting her?"

"At midnight."

"She will not come to meet you; the people around here fear your very name."

"Tell Mrs. Dickson that the man who saved her life trusts his life in her hands; she is a woman, and I will be perfectly safe."

"I'll deliver your message."

"All right; do so, and the day may come when I can do you a good turn."

The two men who had met so strangely, and who during a brief period had been associated in such a weird manner, separated.

Burgess wandered off into the mountains. He was on the lookout for the figure in white.

Certain facts that had come to his mind led him to believe that, after all, it was the lovely Belle Granger whom he had encountered.

Burgess fully understood his peril. He knew that in the end the exasperated whisky men might down him.

They were a desperate set now, and had no motive in temporizing.

Their desperation was born of the ruin he had brought around them.

The fact was, the detective had overheard a number of them talking. They knew that he was still in the mountains, and they would hunt him as they would a ravaging bear.

Burgess had not gone far in the mountains when he became aware that there was some one dogging him.

A chance shot might down him, and he made up his mind to bring the trailer face to face.

The detective kept upon his way until he came to a spot that offered a good place for a covert. Down he dropped, and waited for the dogger to come along.

Fully half an hour passed, when he saw a man skulking along within a few feet of where he lay.

It was very dark, and the man was only revealed in outline.

Burgess waited until the fellow had passed, when he rose from his hiding-place and stole after him. Coming up with the man, our hero clapped his hand heavily upon his shoulder, and said:

"Hold, friend! Where are you going?"

"Lordy, massie! what am dat?" came the answer.

The fellow turned about, and the detective recognized Peter, or Black Jess, as he was called by the mountain people.

"Golly, am dat you?"

"Yes."

"Yer ain't got away from aroun' heah yet?"

"No."

"I were lookin' for yer. Golly! wasn't shuah it were you."

"Will you come with me, old man?"

"What for?"

"To help me find the ghost."

"Yes, sah; and I seed it dis berry night."

"Well, come along."

It was some four miles to the place where Pete had seen the ghost.

Both men were good woodsmen and rapid travelers, and they got over half the distance, when Peter suddenly came to a halt, and exclaimed:

"Hold on dar, massa!"

"What's the matter?"

"Do yer see it?"

"No."

"Well, what am dat?"

Burgess glanced across the clearing, and beheld, perched upon a rock, a hundred feet distant, the white figure of the ghost.

"Jess," said Burgess, "do you mind watching a live ghost?"

"Long as it don't come too clus."

"All right; you lay low here in the bushes, and if you see that ghost move, just whistle."

The figure in white was standing on a ledge heavily fringed with bushes.

The detective's idea was to go round and crawl out through the bushes.

The detective crept around; he had the bearings, and soon came to a point on the cliff opposite to where the figure stood.

It was now necessary for him to move in a very cautious manner, or his game would leap over the ledge.

Dropping upon his hands and knees, he crawled forward, moving not more than an inch a minute.

It was some time before he reached a spot near enough to see that the figure was still there.

Onward moved the steady-nerved man, and in a few minutes he was so near that he could reach forth his hand and seize the skirt of the apparition.

Like a flash, his hand darted forward, and the next moment he was upon his feet and had caught the ghost around the waist.

A wild, shrill scream, followed by a succession of piercing shrieks, broke the stillness; but the detective had his game.

A startling revelation attended his capture, and at the same moment a wild, glad thrill pulsed his heart.

It was not Belle Granger.

He had captured a woman of middle age.

One glance was enough to tell the sad story. The figure in white—the ghost of Black Jess's imagination—was a poor, harmless maniac.

Burgess had just satisfied himself of the fact, when, glancing over the ledge, he saw two figures approaching.

He made up his mind that some of the avenging moonshiners were upon him, but a moment later he learned the contrary.

The men came right up under the ledge, and called out:

"Whoever you may be up there, please hold on to that poor creature."

"Who are you?" called back the detective.

"Wait until we come around on to the ledge, and we will tell you; only hold on to the woman."

The men soon appeared on the ledge.

The moment the woman saw them she recommenced to shriek and struggle in the most violent manner.

The men sought to catch hold of her, when the detective commanded:

"Hold on, gentlemen. Who are you?"

One of the men spoke up and said:

"I am that poor woman's brother."

"If you are her brother, why have you permitted her to roam the mountains?"

"Well, stranger, your question is a proper one, and I would say that we've been hunting for that poor woman this last ten days."

"How long has she been in this condition?"

"Twelve years."

"How did she happen to get away?"

"That's just what we can't tell."

The detective was satisfied that the man told the truth.

"You will not abuse her?"

"Abuse her? Why, mister, I'd lay out any man who would harm a hair of the dear creature's head."

Iron Burgess turned the woman over to the charge of her relatives, and received their thanks for securing her.

Having solved the mystery of the woman in white, our hero had no further business in the wilderness.

He was now rejoiced that he had made an appointment with Mrs. Dickson, satisfied in his own mind that he could compel the woman to reveal the real truth to him.

Descending from the ledge, he found Jess awaiting him.

The detective had a long talk with the negro, and then started off to keep his appointment with Mrs. Dickson.

Burgess knew just what risk he was running; but, as our readers also know, he was not a man to be deterred from a purpose because of the risk.

He reached the vicinity of the tavern before midnight, and lay around in wait until the hour arrived when the tryst was to be kept.

At the hour of midnight he saw a female figure steal from the rear of the tavern and proceed toward the knoll.

The woman had stood upon the knoll fully ten minutes, and was just moving away when our hero knew that the right moment had arrived.

Noiselessly he stole forward and soon confronted her.

"Madame, I am glad that you have come to meet me."

"Indeed, I would not have come had I not surmised the purpose of the interview."

"Then you do surmise the purpose of my desire to meet you?"

"I do; and I am glad that you sent your true name, or I would not have come."

"I hope you are friendly to the purpose of my visit?"

"I owe you my life, sir; I could not be unfriendly to you."

"Does Belle Granger live?"

"She does."

"Is she in this vicinity?"

"No."

"Madame, have I a right to ask the other question?"

"You have, most certainly."

The detective advanced close to Mrs. Dickson, and asked:

"Where can I find Belle?"

"The time has come to tell," was the woman's ready response.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A GLAD thrill went through the heart of the detective.

He felt that at last he was to find Belle, and could address her in a manner far different from what he had previously dared.

When Mrs. Dickson said, "The hour has come for me to speak," the detective's face brightened, and he answered:

"Thank you, madame."

"Why do you seek to find Belle Granger?"

"Madame, I love your niece."

"And you would seek her hand in honorable marriage?"

"I would."

"What are your means?"

"I have ample means, madame."

"And you are at perfect liberty to contract an honorable marriage?"

Before the detective could reply, there came the report of a gun.

"Fly, sir, fly!" called Mrs. Dickson.

"Speak, madame! Where will I find Belle? You and I may not have another chance for a meeting."

"Go study the head-stones in Spartsville Church-yard!" cried the woman; and she darted away.

The report of a gun was so common an occurrence in that neighborhood that the detective was not at all alarmed. That it had anything to do with his meeting with Mrs. Dickson he could not tell.

But he had no more business at the tavern that night.

It was a most remarkable fact that the gunshot had not appeared to have aroused any one. Once away on the road, the detective had time to consider Mrs. Dickson's strange words:

"Study the head-stones in Spartsville Church-yard."

Spartsville Church-yard was the place where our hero's father and mother were buried.

It was distant about ten miles from the tavern of the man Dickson.

Iron Burgess resolved to take the woman at her word and visit Spartsville Church-yard at once.

He had his horse picketed not far away, and was soon on his way to the village cemetery.

An hour brought him to the church.

It was after midnight.

The detective knew the old sexton well, and went to his residence adjoining the church.

A loud rap was answered from an upper window.

"Who is there?"

"Come down, Mr. Small; I wish to see you."

"Who are you?"

"A stranger."

"I am not coming down to meet strangers at this hour."

"I hold a hundred dollars in my hand for you."

The old sexton was an avaricious man.

"You mean no treachery?" he asked.

"Who could wish to harm a poor man like you?" was the response.

"I will come down."

"Bring a lantern."

"All right."

A few moments passed and the sexton ap-

peared in the door-way, carrying a lantern in his hand.

Burgess counted out one hundred dollars in new greenbacks.

The sexton held the bills before his lantern to examine them.

"Old man, I am in a hurry."

"I am at your service. What grave do you wish to visit?"

"The grave of Miss Belle Granger," said the detective in a husky voice.

"Oh, all right; come right along."

The sexton led the way through the cemetery paths, and finally came to a halt before a newly made grave.

There was a new head-stone over the mound, and with trembling hand, our hero seized the lantern, and holding it to the white slab, read:

"TO THE MEMORY
OF
MISS BELLE GRANGER,
Aged 18 *years.*
Died ——"

"My God!" moaned the strong man—and he drew his coat-sleeve across his eyes.

"You do not want the grave opened, sir?"

"No."

The sexton picked up his lantern, and the two men walked away.

The detective was a desperate man now, ready to hazard all chances. He was also a fierce and dangerous man.

He had arrived within a mile of the tavern, when he heard horses' feet tramping over the road coming toward him from the tavern.

In a moment he had dismounted, and leading his horse to one side, he tethered him and dropped to a covert, and laid low to watch.

He had but just time to conceal himself, when a cavalcade of armed men rode by him.

At once the detective recognized that a tragedy was in progress.

Three men rode on either side of an unarmed man.

Judge Lynch had held a session, and the judgment of such an irresponsible court was about to be carried out.

From the moment our hero's eyes fell upon the prisoner he was the man's friend, and at the same moment resolved to become a rescuer.

As the party rode by, our hero fell in their wake and followed afoot.

A quarter of a mile further on and the party turned from the main road.

The detective knew their destination; they were on their way to Hangman's Glen.

The latter was a spot where dozens of lynchings had taken place.

Hangman's Glen was a lonely ravine, in the center of which stood a solitary tree.

The detective was wide awake, and under no circumstances did he fear tackling a dozen men, let alone half that number.

The horsemen came to a halt under the tree.

The detective crawled to within twenty feet of the party.

A rope was thrown over the branch which had supported the weight of so many victims, and a noose was slipped around the victim's neck.

The latter spoke in a firm and untrembling voice.

"Will you not let a man say a few words in defense of his life?"

"No, sir. We know our business."

At that moment the detective stepped forward, and, in a firm voice, said:

"Let the man tell his story."

The six men turned and gazed in amazement at the stranger.

"Who may you be, friend?" asked one of the men.

"It makes no difference who I am. I want that man to have an opportunity to tell his story."

"Heaven bless you, my friend! Gain time for me, and I will prove that I came into the mountains on purely private business."

"Have no fears, sir; you shall have ample time."

"He shall, eh?" cried one of the men; and he caught hold of the rope, ready to give a pull.

"Let go of that rope, or you go down!" said Burgess, as cool as a cucumber.

"Look here, stranger, I reckon if you talk that way we may find it convenient to hang you up along with this ere man."

"You will do no hanging here to-night."

"We won't, eh?"

"No."

"Mebbe you'll be so kind as to let us know who you are?"

"Are you anxious to know who I am?"

"We be."

"Can't you guess?" answered the detective, with the utmost coolness.

"We're not guessing, stranger."

"I am a Government agent," came the startling reply. "I am Iron Burgess, the man you call Blakie around here."

Five revolvers belched forth.

At the moment the extraordinary nerve of the detective was displayed, also his wonderful power of calculating time.

As the revolvers belched forth, he dropped to the ground.

The power that is in the name of a man of distinguished prowess was made known at the same instant.

All the lynchers were men used to scrimmages, and under ordinary circumstances would have fought to the death; but having failed to drop their man at the first shot, they took to their heels and left the strange being, Iron Burgess, master of the field.

The detective advanced and released the noose from over the doomed man's neck.

"Friend, you have saved my life."

"Come with me; we have not a moment to spare; a hundred fiends will soon be upon our track."

"Why are they so anxious to take human life?"

"They are lawless men! they are moonshiners!"

The detective led the way to where his horse was picketed, having first mounted the man whom he had rescued on the best animal belonging to the assassins.

He had but just time to mount, when he heard the rush of many horses behind him.

"Aha! they are already upon our track."

The detective and the rescued man put spurs to their horses and galloped away.

Burgess led the way to a bridle-path, where they branched off and struck into the recesses of the mountains, and finally came to a halt.

"I reckon we are beyond pursuit now," said the detective.

"And I am at liberty, I suppose, to ask a few questions," returned the stranger.

"You are."

"My name is Galton."

"Well, Mr. Galton, it is lucky that I chanced to be on hand just at the right moment."

"Indeed it was; and yet do you know, sir, my recent experience seems but a nightmare-like dream to me."

"It was more than a dream, sir."

"It is hard to believe that such a thing could happen in the United States and in the nineteenth century; why, I would have had more chance for life among the cannibals of the South Sea Islands."

"How did they come to select you as a victim?"

"I do not know. I had not been two hours in this region when I was led away by a gang of men to be hung like an adjudged criminal."

"Did they prefer no charge against you?"

"Sir, I arrived at that tavern after dark. I had private business, but had concluded to wait until morning before announcing my business, when I was confronted by a man who called me by a strange name. I told the fellow he had made a mistake, when he replied that I could not come that over him, and he went out and brought in a number of other men, who straightway seized me and led me away."

"Do you think the man really mistook you for some one else?"

"I really can not tell."

"What charge did they make against you?"

"No direct charge, until they accused me under the gallows tree of being a Government agent."

The detective related all that had occurred in that region, and accounted for the fact of such an outrage.

"And I owe my life to the great detective, Iron Burgess."

"I am Iron Burgess. And now, sir, what was your business down this way?"

"My business was of a purely private nature."

"I am not asking out of mere curiosity. I only wish to know whether or not I can be of any service to you?"

"Well, there is no reason why I should not tell my business to Iron Burgess. I am trying to discover the whereabouts and identity of a young lady known as Belle Granger."

CHAPTER XXVII.

IRON BURGESS could hardly credit his own ears.

"You are looking for a young lady named Belle Granger?"

"I am."

"My friend, yours will prove a fruitless errand."

"Do you know the girl?"

"I did know her."

"You did know her?"

"Yes."

"You speak in the past tense?"

"I do."

"Is she dead?"

"She is dead."

"Have you absolute evidence of her death?"

"I have."

"Then the chances are that the young lady is dead?"

"Will you tell me the object of your search for that young lady?"

"She is an heiress to a large property."

"Who is next of kin?"

"Her aunt."

"What is her aunt's name?"

"Dickson."

"The wife of the tavern-keeper?"

The two men had reached a place where a man lived who had upon former occasions afforded shelter to our hero.

They entered the house and had some refreshment.

It was just dawn, and they found the owner of the house at his morning's meal.

When the meal was over the two men walked outside and resumed their conversation.

"You say," said Galton, "'indeed, then the girl was murdered?'"

"I do."

"By whom?"

"Her aunt."

"I don't believe it."

"I am sure of it."

"There is some mystery here," said Galton.

"Are you a lawyer?"

"I am."

"There is no mystery in this case; the girl was murdered by her aunt, or at her instigation."

"I don't believe it," said the lawyer.

"But I know she is dead."

"Did you know the girl when living?"

"I did."

"Did you see her after death?"

"I did not."

"Then why are you so assured of her death?"

"I have seen a man who saw her after death."

"Did the man know her in life?"

"I can not say that he did."

"Then why are you so positive?"

Burgess related his experience of the night before. When he had concluded, the lawyer said:

"I am now fully convinced that the girl still lives."

The detective was a little nettled that the lawyer should doubt his judgment in such a matter.

The lawyer said at length:

"I have reason to believe that a trick has been played."

A new hope arose in our hero's bosom.

"You have reason to suspect deception?" said Burgess.

"I have."

"We can solve all doubts."

"How?"

"The sexton is at our service."

"I think we could solve our doubts in an easier manner."

"How?"

"If I could manage to obtain an interview with Mrs. Dickson."

"You could not rely upon any statement from her."

"I think I could."

"I know better."

"What do you propose?" asked Galton.

"You have not invited my co-operation."

"I do now."

"I propose that we have the grave opened."

"I am willing."

It was agreed between the two men that they would ride over to the cemetery that same night and open the grave.

Burgess had come to believe that the lawyer possessed grounds for his suspicions that he was not prepared to reveal.

The two men passed the day in a quiet manner, discussing numerous subjects of interest.

Our hero tried hard to gain Mr. Galton's confidence, but failed.

The lawyer merely stated that at the proper time he would have a strange story to tell.

Late in the afternoon the detective determined to make an effort to learn what had been transpiring around the tavern.

He made an appointment with the lawyer to meet him at a certain point at midnight.

The man at whose house they were temporarily resting was to act as a guide for Mr. Galton to the rendezvous.

Mounting his horse, our hero rode away.

Once alone, he made one of those wonderful changes in his personal appearance, and rode out boldly on to the main road.

It was toward sunset, and a great mountain storm was brewing.

The detective sought shelter under an overhanging rock. He had not been long in position when he was joined by a man traveling afoot.

"Reckon we're going to have a storm," said the stranger.

"It looks like it."

"Which way did you come?" asked the man.

"From over the mountain," was the reply.

"You haven't been down near Dickson's tavern to-day?"

"No."

"Been strange goings-on down there. They tell me the Government has a thousand men in the mountains."

At that moment the storm burst with terrible fury.

The detective remained under shelter until it was over, when he started once more toward the tavern to face a strange peril.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IRON BURGESS had adopted a singular disguise.

Long study had enabled him, when necessity required, to get up as quite a youth.

He approached the tavern and gazed from a distance through the windows.

As usual, quite a number of men were lounging round.

Arrived at the stoop, he went to the tavern window and pressed his face against a pane of glass.

A moment, and he was discovered by those in the room.

One of the men came to the door, and thrusting his head out, asked:

"What are you doing there?"

"I'm lookin' for my brother."

"Who is your brother?"

"Bill Velman."

The detective, as usual, had availed himself of an incident that had come under his observation.

A number of days previously, at a place some miles distant, he had seen a chap thus looking for a brother who was on a spree.

In adopting his disguise, he had imitated the lad, and had also gathered some facts in relation to the two brothers.

"Your brother is not here."

"Yes, he be; I saw him go in there."

"Well, he must have left again; he ain't here now."

"He's somewhere around, and I am going to wait for him."

The man went back into the tavern, and the youth threw himself upon an old bench on the porch.

Half an hour passed. Men were passing in and out of the tavern.

The moment had now arrived for the detective to act.

He went toward the back of the tavern, climbed the sheds, and made his way into the tavern through the windows of the upper story.

The detective knew the interior of the house well, and he went direct to the sitting-room of Mrs. Dickson and knocked at the door.

There came no answer.

It took him but a moment to unlock the door.

Upon opening the door, he saw that the room was in total darkness.

He advanced toward the bed and felt a human form.

"Mrs. Dickson," he said.

"Who are you?" came the answer.

"A friend."

"How dare you enter this room? and what is your business?"

"Speak low," said the detective, "and tell me where is Mrs. Dickson?"

"Mrs. Dickson has gone."

"Well, keep your mouth shut and go away."

"What will you do?"

"I will follow the advice I gave you; come, let's both get out of here."

"But who are you?"

"Tell me first who you are."

"My name is Kate Louray."

"Do you live in the tavern?"

"No."

"You were a friend of Mrs. Dickson?"

"Yes."

"Where will I find you to-morrow?"

The girl named a place, and then asked:

"Who are you?"

"I will tell you to-morrow."

"Why not to-night?"

"I've good reasons; now go."

The girl slipped out of the room.

The detective stood a moment, considering what he should do, then climbed out and went off toward the point where he was to meet Galton.

Burgess was well pleased with the result of his adventure. One incident surprised him, and that was the fact that Mrs. Dickson had found it necessary to steal away.

He regretted that he had not met her, as he felt assured that, with the facts in his possession, he could induce her to tell the truth concerning Belle Granger.

The detective found Galton at the appointed place.

The two men were well mounted, and made a quick ride of it to the old sexton's house.

Again it was after midnight when the detective arrived.

A rap brought the sexton's head out of the window.

"Who's there?" came the query.

"Your hundred-dollar man," was the reply.

"What do you want now?"

"We want you to open a grave, old man."

CHAPTER XXIX.

WHEN the sexton heard the strange request, "We want you to open a grave," he promptly answered:

"I don't open graves at night."

"If you want to earn a hundred dollars, you will."

"Hold on; I will be down in a minute."

The men waited, and in a few seconds the sexton came down.

All hands proceeded to the cemetery.

The sexton started to go toward another grave than the one he had pointed out to our hero as the resting-place of Belle Granger.

Burgess at first made a move as though to stop him, but seemingly concluded to let the fellow show his hand.

The sexton led the way to a grave in a distant part of the cemetery, and said, as he stuck his shovel in the mound:

"This is the one you want opened?"

"Why do you think this is the one I want opened?"

"It is the one I led you to the other night."

"Do you think it is?"

"I ought to know."

"Yes, you had ought to know that this is not the grave."

"All right; lead me to the one you want opened."

The detective had an idea of the position of the grave he wanted open, and led the way to it.

"An old man lies there."

Burgess flashed the light of his dark-lantern on the slab, and, to his amazement, saw that it was a new stone, and that the name on it was that of a man.

The sexton chuckled and said:

"I reckon you will admit that I know more about this cemetery than you do."

"This is the grave you led me to the other night."

"No, sir; the other was the grave."

The detective at once saw that some trick had been played.

He was a man who, once having been to a certain place, could return there again.

He had no doubt but that it was the right mound—at least, the one at whose head had been the slab bearing the name of Belle Granger.

"Who paid for the changing of these slabs?"

"There has been no change."

"Where is Belle Granger's grave?"

"There is no person who once bore that name lying in this cemetery."

"Are you playing for more money, or have you made up your mind to deceive me?"

"What interest have I in the matter?"

"Open this grave."

"I will not."

"I promised you a hundred dollars?"

"You did."

"You will not get the money unless you open this grave."

"There is nothing in that grave; it is a fraud."

The sexton threw off his coat and commenced digging. He did not get down more than two feet when his pick thumped upon a coffin-lid.

Bang! bang! went his pick through the coffin-lid.

"Now will you believe me?" he said; and he reached his hands through the opening in the casket and drew forth a number of stones.

"Let me see," said the detective, and he flashed the light of his lantern down into the coffin.

"Are you satisfied?"

"No."

"What do you want more?"

"I want the coffin removed."

"I'll dig no more;" and the sexton commenced shoveling the dirt once more upon the exposed coffin that contained the stones.

The detective drew a pair of steel handcuffs from his pocket, and in a twinkling clapped them upon the sexton's wrists, with the remark:

"You are my prisoner."

The sexton trembled like one suffering from a severe fit of ague.

"You have no warrant to arrest me," he said in a tremulous tone.

"I do not need any authority: I am an authority in myself."

Turning to Galton, the detective said:

"You hold that man."

"What are you going to do?" pleaded the sexton.

"I am going to turn sexton for the occasion."

Against the man's earnest and continued protestations the detective commenced to dig.

Burgess was a powerful man, and in a little time he had the coffin with the stones removed.

One glance was sufficient—it was fresh dirt beneath; the upper coffin was but a blind.

Rapidly the dirt flew out.

It was not long before the detective's pick struck upon another coffin-lid.

A few moments more and the coffin was fully exposed at the head-piece.

The detective broke in the coffin-lid and leaped out of the grave.

"Are you satisfied now?" asked the sexton.

"I am," came the answer.

The detective had uncovered the dead face of what had once been a fair young girl, but it was not Belle Granger.

"What was the name of the dead?" he asked.

"Margaret Brown."

"Did she die a natural death?"

"She did."

"Why all this mystery?"

"That is my secret."

"Open your secret, or I will remove you from here a prisoner."

"I will not tell my secret."

"You are an abettor in some dark crime."

The men were gathered about the grave, presenting a strange tableau, when a most startling addition was made to the picture.

A figure in white—the figure of a woman—stood in their midst.

"My wife!" cried the sexton.

"What does all this mean?" asked the woman.

"Scream, Tilly, scream! these men would murder me."

"Why would they murder you?"

"Because I will not betray a sacred confidence."

"I guess they will not hurt you."

"Will you stand there and see your husband murdered?"

"No."

"Then scream—scream as loud as you can"

"Wait until I know what the gentlemen require of you."

"They are not gentlemen; they are villains."

The detective now spoke, and said:

"Madame, do you value your husband's liberty?"

"I do."

"Then you may answer for him."

"What information are you seeking?"

"There was a person buried here who in life was known as Miss Belle Granger?"

Yes, sir; there was such a person buried here."

"No, there was not," cried the sexton.

"Why do you deny the truth, my dear? You know there was such a person buried here."

"No, there never was."

"Madame, do you know just where the person was buried?"

"Yes; I do."

"Where?"

"You have already opened the grave."

"Do you mean this one?" asked the detective, pointing toward the open grave.

"I do."

"Madame, it is evident that you have come here to aid your husband in concealing the truth."

"No, sir; to the best of my knowledge and belief that is the grave of Belle Granger."

"It is not Belle Granger's remains lying in yonder coffin."

"Did you know the young lady in life?"

"I did."

"If there has been any deception, I have not been a party to it;" and turning to her husband, the woman added: "Jeremiah, if you can explain this mystery, I pray you do so."

"There has been no mystery."

"Why was this coffin placed on yonder coffin below if there has been no mystery?"

"That is easily explained."

"Please explain it."

"I will at the proper time."

All conversation was stopped at the moment by a most startling interruption.

A body of men rode by the cemetery gate

Quick as lightning, the detective extinguished his light.

The detective called to Galton:

"Come, we have not an instant to stay; we have been followed."

"Who are the new-comers?" asked Galton.

"We can not stop to ask questions," was the detective's quick reply.

Burgess and the lawyer stole through the darkness.

When far beyond sight and hearing, our hero said:

"You remain here."

"Where do you go?"

"I wish to discover the meaning of this raid."

"Go; I will remain."

The detective always went prepared for changes in his personal appearance, and when he was a short distance away from the lawyer he made a lightning change.

In a few seconds he was the cow-boy once more.

He stole out of the cemetery and came around to the entrance near the sexton's house, just as three or four men were entering. The men saw him, and turning sharply around, inquired:

"Are you the sexton?"

"No."

"Do you belong around here?"

"Yes."

"You know the sexton?"

"Yes."

"What is his name?"

"His name is Jeremiah Beers."

"Do you know where he can be found?"

"To home, I suppose."

"He is not at home."

"Then I can't give you the information."

The men entered the grave-yard, while the cow-boy walked away whistling a lively air.

The cow-boy did not keep up his whistling very long, but when well past the cemetery gate, he suddenly made a spring over the fence and followed the men.

The men in the meantime had walked along until they met the sexton and his wife returning from the open grave.

The former had remained to fill in the grave after the two men who had demanded its opening had disappeared.

"Is your name Jeremiah Beers?" asked one of the men.

"That is my name."

"You are sexton of this cemetery?"

"I am."

"You live over there?" and the man pointed to the sexton's residence.

"Yes, I live there."

"Well, come along; some friends have called to see you."

"What do you require at my hands?"

"We want the body of Belle Granger."

Iron Burgess, in his disguise as a cow-boy, overheard this singular demand.

"I know nothing about the body of Belle Granger," came the reply.

"You have just three minutes to tell where we can find the body."

"I do not know."

"You may use your time to suit yourself, but at the expiration of three minutes you speak or take the consequences."

"I will speak," said the sexton.

The sexton's wife at this moment entered a protest, when the man who appeared to be the leader of the party of men said:

"Lead this woman to the house, and stand guard over her."

"Jeremiah," called the woman, "if you reveal anything, you are a coward."

"Hurry that woman away," came the command.

Poor Burgess! his blood ran cold.

All hope of finding Belle Granger alive had now been banished from his heart.

The woman had by her admonition admitted that there was a secret to reveal.

Her husband, however, appeared determined not to heed her caution, but led the band of men away to show them where the body of the murdered girl lay.

CHAPTER XXX.

He led the way to a distant part of the burial-ground, and at length stopped before a new-made grave.

"The girl is buried here."

"Well, open the grave."

"How can I open the grave? Would you have me scratch away the dirt with my finger-nails?"

"You have implements, of course?"

"Not here."

"Where?"

"At the house."

"Go and get them."

The sexton moved away quickly, when the leader of the men said to a companion:

"Go and watch him, to make sure that he does not slip away."

The man followed the sexton, and our hero also followed in the same direction.

Iron Burgess was puzzled at the sexton's movements.

If the fellow was really going to open the grave, he would let him alone; but if Jeremiah was only carrying out a scheme to escape, he would need help.

There was but one way for our hero to make sure. He must exchange a few words with the sexton, and in order to do so it was necessary to dispose of the man who was dogging him.

The detective went for the latter. He had no idea of injuring the man, but his removal was necessary.

To decide was to act, and our hero crept after the fellow.

The latter heard footsteps behind, and, turning, saw the cow-boy at his heels.

"Halloo! you are following me."

"Can't I go the same way as yourself without being accused of following you?"

"You are a bold fellow."

"I am."

"Speak. Who are you?"

"They call me Blakie around here."

With the word Blakie the detective leaped forward and seized him.

"Don't make any outcry. You came down with that gang who are looking for the body of Belle Granger?"

"I did."

The detective clapped a pair of handcuffs on the man and placed a gag in his mouth. He then upset him, tied his feet firmly together, and tossed him in a clump of bushes.

When the detective started again to follow the sexton, the latter had disappeared entirely from view.

Burgess proceeded toward the sexton's house, and had reached a point from where he could see the windows, where a most startling apparition passed before his eyes.

Our hero had dropped down in the grass, intending to watch a few minutes to see what disposition Jeremiah Beers would make of himself.

It was while thus lying down that the apparition appeared to him.

The form of a female carrying a lamp went by one of the windows.

The detective had a momentary view only, but a perfectly distinct one, and it was, as he supposed, the living face of Belle Granger.

His first impulse was to run to the house and declare what he had seen; but suddenly a weird suspicion shot through his mind.

Iron Burgess was a proud man, and there was a strange suggestiveness in the fact if it were really the living face of Belle Granger that he had seen.

If it were the living girl, she was a voluntary recluse; she was hiding herself from some one else. Why all this mystery? Why make it ever appear that she was dead?

But a few seconds passed when a woman issued from the sexton's house.

Quick as thought, Iron Burgess pierced a secret.

The seeming woman that came from the house was a man in disguise, evidently the sexton.

The fellow went away lively, while our hero started off after him.

Jeremiah Beers took to his heels.

As Iron Burgess followed after him, he could not refrain from calculating in his mind the probable meaning of all that had occurred during the last few hours.

It was an easy matter for him to follow the sexton.

The latter had no idea of hiding a trail; it became merely a matter of speed, and as our hero was the swifter runner, he soon had the grave-digger in sight.

When within hailing distance, the detective called out:

"Halt!"

The sexton came to a stop.

Burgess had, while running, retained his disguise as a cow-boy, and as he came up nearer to the sexton, the latter failed to recognize him.

"Hold on, my pretty girl; I know you."

"Well, may I be buried in a grave of my own digging," exclaimed the sexton, "if this isn't strange!"

"You can't play no points on me that way, Miss Granger," called the detective.

Our hero was full of laughter, despite the tragic nature of the business that occupied his attention.

"I am not Miss Granger. I never heard of the girl."

"Ah! I know you; I reckon I can see through your disguise."

"I am a lone widow, and I want you to go about your business."

"I tell you it won't do, Miss Granger;" and as the pretended cow-boy spoke he drew nearer.

The detective approached him, and said:

"You will own up that you are Miss Granger?"

"No; I am not Miss Granger."

"Who are you?"

"I am a lone widow."

"You talk very much like a man for a person in woman's clothes," said the detective.

"No; I ain't a man. I am a woman—a lone widow."

"This won't do, Jerry."

The sexton jumped from his knees and cried:

"You know me?"

"Yes."

"Who are you?"

"It matters not. But why are you flying away in disguise?"

"I am flying away from a number of villains."

"I know better"

"I am telling the truth."

"The men wanted you to open a grave?"

"Yes."

"Why did you not do it?"

"Because they would find out that I had deceived them."

"Why are they looking for the body of Belle Granger?"

"I do not know."

"How long has Belle Granger been abiding in your house?"

"As I live, Belle Granger is not in my house."

"Has she been there?"

"Never."

"There is a young lady living in your house?"

"Yes."

"Who is she?"

"Her name is Susan Blake."

"On your honor?"

"Yes."

"Describe her appearance."

The sexton described Belle Granger to the minutest point.

"You say the girl is Susan Blake?"

"Yes."

"Will you take me back and introduce me to her?"

"I will."

It seemed to the bewildered detective as though mystery were destined to follow upon mystery.

CHAPTER XXXI.

The detective had no opportunity to question the old sexton further.

Steps were heard approaching.

It was evident that the men from the mountain tavern, who had been waiting in the grave-yard for the return of the sexton, had discovered that he did not mean to return.

They were all old woodsmen, and striking a trail, found their companion who had been stricken down by Burgess.

The man managed to tell them what had befallen him.

The riders were amazed. They could not conceive who it was that had come upon their track and had foiled them in such a bold manner.

Releasing their companion, they hastened on to the sexton's house.

At the door they were met by Jeremiah's wife; and in answer to their demands the woman told them "that her husband was not in the house."

The men were not satisfied, and commenced a search, but soon returned and announced that the sexton was nowhere in the house.

They soon managed, however, to find the lone widow's trail, and followed straight to the place where he was holding his talk with Burgess.

As stated, the latter heard the noise of approaching steps, and moved rapidly and silently away without giving any warning to the sexton.

By the time the latter had concluded to move on he was discovered.

The sexton started to run, but was brought to a stand.

The poor fellow appeared to be hunted on every side.

As the gang drew near, he determined still to attempt the woman dodge.

The men came forward and demanded:

"Why were you running away, old woman?"

"I was in a hurry to get home to my children."

"Where did you just come from?"

"The sexton's house," was the answer.

"Was the sexton there when you left?"

"Yes."

It was a cute answer the disguised grave-digger had made.

His idea was that the men would return to the house, and he would take French leave.

"Did the sexton leave the house at the same time as you did?"

"No."

"Where is he?"

"In his house now."

"How do you know?"

"I left him there."

The men approached nearer, when one of them swung a torch down close to the sexton's skirts.

The sexton, attempting to spring backward, struck against a stone and fell.

His heels flew up, and disclosed a manly pair of legs, with a stout pair of feet incased in man's shoes.

The poor sexton was unmasked, and one of the men exclaimed:

"Get up, Mister Man."

Jeremiah rose to his feet. He caught a torch from one of the men standing near him, and in wild fury commenced belaboring his captors over the head.

The sexton's violence was ended by a blow on the head, and the next moment he was securely tied with halter straps.

The leader of the gang of marauders commenced a cross-examination.

"See here, my man, why did you attempt to escape?"

"Because I had enough of you rascals."

"A man was seen talking to you a few minutes ago."

"Who saw a man talking to me?"

"I did."

"Well, you did; what of it?"

"Who was the man?"

"I don't know."

"You are deceiving me."

"I am not."

"You know who the man was well enough."

"I do not."

The leader of the gang called out:

"Boys, have you the rope?"

"Ay, ay!" came the answer.

"Well, I reckon we'll have to do some hanging around here."

"We're ready, captain."

"Find a tree."

"There's one right behind the man you want to hang."

"Will you tell all you know, or hang?" asked the leader of the men.

"I have nothing to tell."

"Throw your rope over the branch, lads."

The old sexton's hands were tied, and he could offer no resistance.

"Now, then, old man, as sure as you breathe this moment you will be dead the next if you do not confess."

"I have nothing to confess."

"Get hold of the rope, boys."

The men caught hold of the rope.

"One!" called the leader, and a second later, "Two!" and then once more asked:

"Will you confess?"

"I've nothing to confess."

"Three!" called the leader of the gang of assassins, and the men gave a pull on the rope, and all fell in a heap together, while the old sexton stood unmoved, as the end of the rope went flying over the branch, leaving the noose around his neck.

With the word "Three!" pronounced by the leader, a bullet had severed the assassins' rope a foot above the sexton's head.

A curse fell from the captain's lips. He rushed toward the trembling sexton, when there came a voice, exclaiming:

"Hold!"

The captain of the gang did hold, and stood gazing around in amazed wonderment, while his men gathered around him

"What has happened?" asked one of the men.

The captain answered in a low tone:

"There is some one near by who has a bead on me."

"The voice came from that direction?"

"Yes."

The man called upon his comrades to follow him.

Not a man stirred.

There was something mysterious about the singular occurrence, and in fact the shadow of that terrible presence, Iron Burgess, fell over the men.

The detective had met them at odds so often, and always with such discomfiture to themselves, that the very idea of his presence was sufficient to paralyze them.

The whole gang of men were filled with horror. They left the sexton standing under the shadow of the tree upon which they would have hung him, with the noose still about his neck.

As the men marched away, Iron Burgess came from the thicket, and approaching Jeremiah Beers, said:

"Old man, I have saved your life."

"I am not safe yet."

"Fly!"

Jeremiah tore the noose from his neck, and did not wait for a second bidding.

Burgess walked around toward the sexton's house.

He saw the men mount their horses and ride away.

They had been beaten off.

The detective waited until they had all gone, when he re-entered the grave-yard and proceeded toward the place where he had left the lawyer, Galton.

He found the lawyer standing on exactly the same spot where he had left him.

An hour and a half had passed since our hero had gone away.

"What has happened?" asked the lawyer.

The detective related all that had occurred.

"That sexton possesses some knowledge of the missing girl," said Galton.

"The missing girl?"

"Yes."

"You think she still lives?"

"There is no question in my mind but that she still lives; and, what is more, it is my opinion that the girl whom you saw pass the window of the sexton's house was Belle Granger in the flesh."

"I know when a man lies to me, and the old sexton told the truth when he said it was not Belle Granger."

"He told the truth, undoubtedly, as far as he knew; the old man has been deceived. I tell you there is some great mystery here."

"There has been some great mystery throughout the whole affair," answered Burgess.

"We will find the girl."

"Where?"

"In the sexton's house."

"Will you go find her?"

"I will, if you decline to aid me."

"I will help you."

"Then we will find the girl; and I am surprised that a man of your shrewdness should be fooled with the idea that she was dead."

The detective was not fooled as much as it might appear. The fact was, he almost dreaded to discover that the girl really was living, since from several circumstances that had come to his knowledge he had begun to fear that the beautiful girl was false.

Had he believed her false, it would have been more satisfaction to him to have known that she was dead.

A strange rumor had come to him concerning her and the man to whom she had claimed that only her troth had been pledged.

Addressing Galton, the detective said:

"You have never revealed to me your object in discovering the girl."

"I have; I told you that she was heiress to a large estate."

"Do you know anything of her previous career?"

"I am not at liberty to reveal what I know."

"Answer me one question: is Belle Granger a widow?"

"I can not answer any questions until the girl is found."

The lawyer's equivocal answer sent a chill through our hero. His worst suspicions were confirmed. If Belle Granger had not been a married woman, the lawyer would have said so at once.

Accepting the theory that the girl had been a wife, many seemingly singular incidents were explained.

It was yet some hours before dawn, and the lawyer said:

"If we search the sexton's house we will find the girl."

Iron Burgess had come to the same conclusion, and yet he had no heart to make the search. He began to feel as though he wished never to gaze upon her face again.

Had she told him the truth, he could have overlooked her misfortune and loved her still; but he was now convinced that she was voluntarily hiding herself from him, otherwise why hide herself at all?

Again, the marriage theory afforded the only true ground for the mystery that surrounded her disappearance.

"Come," said the lawyer, "will you aid me in finding the girl?"

"Let me think just one minute," answered Burgess.

The detective communed a few moments with his own thoughts.

At length the idea came to him that at least he owed the girl an opportunity to offer her own explanations, and he said:

"I will aid you to find the girl, and I have not the least doubt but we will succeed."

CHAPTER XXXII.

Having once made up his mind to aid in the search, the detective determined to bend every energy toward success.

The two men proceeded to the sexton's house.

"I have a plan," said Burgess.

"I am willing to act under your instructions."

"We must get the sexton's wife out here."

"How can we do it, except by main force?"

"I will show you a way to do it; and when she comes, should she be firm and refuse to answer questions, you must hold her a prisoner."

"That is all right. But how are we to get her out of the house?"

"Lay low," said Burgess; and the next moment there arose a cry for help.

Mr. Galton thought that his companion had suddenly gone crazy. A moment later, however, he learned that there was a method in the detective's madness.

A woman appeared at the rear window of the house, when the detective called, in a voice perfect in its imitation of the sexton's:

"Come, quick!"

The woman showed that she was deceived by calling in response:

"Is that you, Jeremiah?"

"Yes."

"Where are you?"

"Out here."

As the woman came under the shadow of the trees, she was confronted by Burgess, who said:

"I wish to ask you a few questions."

"I will tell you at once that I will answer no questions."

"Your husband is in danger."

"May the Lord protect him!"

"You can save him from harm."

"How?"

"By solving this mystery."

"What mystery?"

"The mystery of the whereabouts of Belle Granger."

"You are speaking of a party whom I have never seen in all my life."

"Madame, the girl has been seen in your house."

"Not to my knowledge."

"Do you know a girl named Susan Blake?"

"I do."

"Was she not in your house this night?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"You admit that you know a young lady named Susan Blake?"

"I do."

"Where does she live?"

"About a mile from here."

"Whom does she reside with?"

"Her aunt."

Iron Burgess motioned to Galton, who came forward from the shadow of the trees.

"Keep this good woman a little while and entertain her until my return."

The lawyer placed his hand upon the woman's shoulder, and said:

"You are my prisoner!"

The woman made no answer, but stood as calm and passive as a lamb ready for sacrifice.

Iron Burgess entered the sexton's house.

The keen man had not been five minutes in the place when he struck a strange clew. He had entered a room on the second floor of the house, and lying upon the floor was a peculiar-looking ornamental comb.

The detective picked up the article, and holding it to the light, at once recognized it as one that he had seen Belle Granger wear in her elegant hair.

The detective continued his search, but not the least sign could he find of a living soul, and he was a man who knew just how to search.

There was not a nook or cranny in that house that was not submitted to the keenest scrutiny.

Again, after a most thorough examination in all other directions, the detective returned to the bedroom where he had found the comb.

In one corner of the room stood a trunk.

Circumstances was the excuse for breaking open the trunk.

The moment the lid was raised and the light of his lantern had been flashed in on the contents, the detective glared with amazement.

He had not found Belle Granger, but he had found her clothing.

From the trunk he drew forth the very dress Belle Granger had worn when last he had gazed upon her beautiful form.

"My heavens! what does this mean?" he cried, as the light from his lantern disclosed dark stains.

The first thought that came to our hero's mind was, "How I have wronged the poor, dear girl!"

At once a new impetus was lent to his search. All the sleuth-hound of his nature was aroused.

Carefully he examined every piece of clothing; and there, under all the circumstances, he found the most convincing evidence of desperate work.

A part of the mystery was opened, and the persistent obstinacy of the sexton and his wife was explained.

The one thought that ran through our hero's mind was, "How I have wronged her! how I have wronged her!"

Concluding his examination of the clothing, the detective put all back in the trunk and closed down the lid.

His mind at once became busy as to whom he should trail.

At length he muttered:

"Galton can throw some light upon this affair."

Iron Burgess returned to the spot where he had left the lawyer and the woman.

He told the latter she could go.

"What have you discovered?" asked Galton.

The detective caught the lawyer by the arm, and exclaimed:

"My friend, you must open your head and tell me all you know."

"My God! man, what do you mean?" exclaimed the lawyer.

"I mean just what I say. You must open your head and tell me all you know about this case."

"Tell me just what information you wish, and, if in my power, you shall have it."

"Enough; but remember, I am not a man whom you can deceive, and if you attempt any of your lawyer smartness you will get into trouble. Now, then," he continued, "give me the information I require."

"I pledge you that I will—on my honor, I will; but, as a guide to what I may say, please tell me what you have discovered?"

"I have discovered beyond question that Belle Granger is dead."

"Did she die a natural death?"

"The evidence points to an opposite conclusion."

"You say the evidence is positive?"

"It is."

"Then there is no reason why I should conceal certain facts any longer," remarked the lawyer.

"As it is, I am groping in the dark," said Burgess.

"I have reason to believe," said the lawyer, "that Belle Granger was a married woman."

"Upon what facts are your suspicions grounded?"

"Belle Granger, if living, is heiress to a large fortune."

"From whom comes the money?"

"An uncle."

Our hero remembered that Belle had told him that she had but one relative in the world, Mrs. Dickson.

"What proof is there in this inheritance that she was a married woman?"

"The will has provisions that would indicate the fact."

"What are the provisions that suggest such a fact?"

"In case of Belle's death without issue, the money is to go to Mrs. Dickson; and under no circumstances, so says the will, is the legatee's husband to enjoy the fruits of the property."

"The will expressly alludes to Belle Granger in this allusion to the husband?"

"Yes."

"Not Mrs. Dickson?"

"No; I have merely given you the substance of the provisions of the will; the wording in detail leaves no question as to whom the testator refers."

"We must find that body," said Burgess.

"We must; nothing can be done until we have actual proof that the girl is dead."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE two men were standing under the shadow of the trees, about a hundred yards distant from the old sexton's house.

All lights had been extinguished in the house, and all around was cold and dark. Suddenly a bright light shot through one of the windows; the detective saw the glare and quickly ran round to the lawn, where he had laid when he saw the girl with the candle.

The strong man's hair almost stood on end with amazement.

Here once again he beheld the face of Belle Granger.

The light from the girl's candle shone full upon her lovely features, and there was no mistake as to her identity.

He started to run toward the house and find the girl, and clear up all the mysteries that appeared to shadow over her. He felt a hand laid upon his arm, and turning, he saw the lawyer.

"Who is that?" and the lawyer pointed toward the figure so plainly revealed.

"It is Belle Granger."

"Let me go and face her," said the lawyer.

"Go," answered Burgess.

The lawyer started for the house, and our hero saw him enter.

Fully five minutes passed.

The figure of the girl had disappeared from the window and the detective supposed that the lawyer had encountered her.

Fully a quarter of an hour had passed, when the lawyer returned.

"Did you see her?"

"See her? No. Why, I never encountered such a mystery in all my life."

"What do you mean?"

"I searched that house from cellar to garret."

"Why, the girl was at the window fully three minutes after I saw you enter the house."

"It was an apparition, Burgess."

"Apparition be hanged! It was Belle Granger in the flesh."

"Never! I saw the sexton's wife, and she firmly protests that there was no girl at the window with a light. She swears there is no female in the house save herself."

"I'll be hanged if I don't investigate this little mystery myself."

"Do so; but, mind you, I tell you it was a shadow we saw."

The detective went to the house.

He was met at the door by the sexton's wife.

"Am I ever to be left alone?" the woman asked.

"Do you wish to be left alone?"

"I do; it's near daylight, and I have been kept in a continual state of excitement this whole blessed night."

"There is one way for you to be left alone."

"I will do anything to be left in peace."

"Tell me where the girl is who stood at the window with a light?"

"I tell you there is no female in this house save myself."

"I know better."

"You are at liberty to come in and search the house."

"I know of an easier way to find the girl."

"You are welcome to adopt any way you choose."

"Would you save the girl's life?"

"I would save any one's life from peril."

"Tell me where the girl is concealed."

"As I live and speak to you, there is no one concealed in this house."

"Then you will not confess?"

"I have nothing to confess."

"Madame, I shall set this house on fire, and if there is any one hidden in the house, they will burn up."

"Who will pay for the loss to my husband?"

"I will."

"Promise to pay for all damage, and I will assist you in locking every door on the outside and bid you fire the house."

"Woman, this is mere bravado."

"You are at liberty to take me at my word."

Iron Burgess was puzzled.

The woman spoke like one who was telling the truth.

The sexton's house was a mere frame, and it would have cost but a few hundred dollars had the detective carried out his threat.

"I will search that house once more," he said, "and if I do not find the girl, I will carry out my threat; I will fire the house."

While our hero was speaking, his keen ears detected the rustle of some one moving inside the house.

Quick as a flash, he rushed in at the door, and an instant later encountered a fresh surprise.

There stood the sexton.

"Where did you come from?"

"I returned to my house."

"The riders may return."

"They will not find me."

"What do you propose to do?"

"Leave this part of the country until this mystery of the girl is settled."

"Listen to me, old man; you can solve this mystery."

"If I could I would instantly."

"You can."

"Do you suppose I would endure all that I have been compelled to suffer if a few words from my lips would settle the whole matter?"

"Yes; I do believe you would endure all that you have suffered rather than speak."

"What would be my motive?"

"Pay."

"Do you know I saved your life?"

"You did."

All further conversation was interrupted at the moment by the lawyer, who came rushing into the house and went flying upstairs as fast as he could run.

The detective followed Galton up the stairs.

The latter rushed into a room and found himself in total darkness.

"Heavens! give us a light," he cried.

The detective's masked-lantern was at his service, and the lawyer flashed the light about the room. Its rays fell upon a white figure seated in a chair near the window.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the lawyer, "what does this mean?"

The figure in white upon the chair was the sexton's wife.

Galton rushed to the window and looked out, and then turning about, told Burgess to hold on to the woman and not let her leave the room until his return.

The detective was content to let the lawyer pursue his little game, whatever it might be.

Galton rushed down-stairs and ran round and round the house like a mad dog, or a hound scenting for a trail.

At times the lawyer would come to a halt and stand lost in thought, and would mutter to himself.

The detective was watching him from the window, and was fain to say that he thought the lawyer had really run mad.

Galton continued going round the house for awhile, but at length he shot off and made a dash down the road.

Burgess finally concluded to follow him, and passed down the stairs.

He met the lawyer returning to the house.

"Now, my friend, tell me what has happened?"

"This house is bewitched, Burgess."

"Tell me what has excited you, and I can give you an opinion."

"You left that woman upstairs in that room?"

"I did."

"You were with me when I found her in that room?"

"I'll so swear."

"Well, when I rushed upstairs to that room, the woman was standing beside me down here."

"What woman?"

"The sexton's wife."

"Tell me the whole circumstance, your account is so incoherent."

"I was talking to the sexton's wife down here."

"Yes."

"Suddenly I saw a light in that room up there."

"Yes."

"I rushed up to the room."

"Yes."

"And I found the light extinguished, and the woman I left down at the door in that room."

"You have lost your head."

"No, sir; what I tell you is true."

"There must have been two women."

"Two women, or a woman and the devil," replied the lawyer.

"I think I begin to smell a mouse—a white mouse," said Burgess.

"What do you suspect?"

"I suspect that Susan Blake has slipped through our fingers."

"Who is Susan Blake?"

"We will know when we catch Miss Susan Blake."

"Where can we find her?"

"We will have to hunt her up. In the meantime, we will try an experiment. And let me tell you, while I think of it, the sexton and his wife are as deep as a forty-foot well."

Iron Burgess led the way into the house, and proceeded to the room where he had left the sexton's wife sitting at the window.

A light had been procured, and the room was plainly illuminated.

"Madame, are you prepared to have me carry out my threat?"

"What threat?"

"To burn the house."

"To burn down my house?"

"You agreed for me to burn down your house."

"Why do you wish to burn down my house?"

"Never mind why I wish to burn it down. Did you not agree that I should burn it down?"

"I did not."

The detective turned to the lawyer and whispered:

"It is as I thought; a game has been played upon us. There were two wives of the sexton around here; that woman there knows nothing of the conversation I held with the other one."

"I reckon, madame, that I have opened up your game."

"I do not know what you mean."

The detective, having his attention aroused, noted the fact of a difference in the tones of the voice and the accent of the two women.

The question now presented itself, which was which? and who was who?

"Go down-stairs and invite the sexton up here," said Burgess.

At the moment the sexton stepped into the room.

"Is that your wife?" asked Burgess.

"That is my wife."

"Who was the other woman who was got up as your wife?"

"I do not know what you are talking about."

The detective crossed the room and grabbed the woman by the hair of her head. He pulled her off her seat until she screamed.

"That settles it," said the detective, as the sexton ran to his wife's assistance.

"Brute! to abuse an old woman in that manner!" cried Jeremiah Beers.

The detective laughed as he remarked:

"It was a nice game, and I acknowledge myself beat."

The lawyer came to his side and asked:

"What is settled?"

"That woman there is the real wife of the grave-digger."

"Then who was the other woman?"

"That we must find out."

"Belle Granger is not dead," said Galton.

"I think she is dead."

"Then who is the other woman?"

The detective bent down his head close to the lawyer's ear and whispered:

"Her heir at law."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Galton, "you mean Mrs. Dickson?"

"Yes."

"But the figure we saw with the candle at the window?"

Burgess was compelled to admit that the mystery had deepened, and deepened until he was completely at fault.

"But one thing remains for us to do," he said.

"Find the woman who was dressed as the grave-digger's wife," cried Galton.

"Exactly," answered Burgess.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THERE were many blood-hounds owned in the neighborhood, and Burgess thought that if he could only secure the services of one of them he would be all right.

He remembered having seen a negro's cabin about a quarter of a mile from the cemetery; and leaving Galton to watch the sexton's house, he proceeded there.

It was after midnight, and few men would have dared to have gone and aroused the colored man's family, owing to the fact that the negroes had often been visited by the night-riders, and were dangerous when suspicious

The detective passed up toward the cabin, when suddenly the door flew open and a negro armed with a rifle appeared in the door-way.

"Don't yer come here, boss! don't yer come here!"

"You black fool! don't you want to earn some money?"

"How's dat?"

"I want to hire the services of your dog."

"What for, boss?"

"To track a runaway."

"A colored man?"

"No."

"Look yer, my dog knows better den to track a colored man."

"I want him to track a white man."

"Shuah?"

"Yes."

"How much you give?"

"If your dog is of service, I'll give you twenty dollars; and here's the money."

The sight of the money acted like magic on the negro, and in a more pleasant tone he asked:

"Who be yer, boss?"

"I am a stranger round here."

"What be yer name?"

"Blakie."

"Golly! yer am de Government agent, eh?"

"Hush, man!"

The detective had given the name without any idea that it would be recognized. As it turned out, the giving of the name was a fortunate circumstance.

The negro had heard of the wonderful exploits of the detective, and at once laying aside his gun, said:

"I'se at yer service, boss."

"Bring your dog, and come along."

The two men and the big hound started toward the sexton's house

They reached it, and found Galton on the watch.

"Has anything occurred?" asked the detective.

"Nothing."

"I see the house is closed and all the lights are out."

"Yes; the sexton and his wife have gone away."

"And you did not stop them?"

"I did not."

"The trail is lost."

"No; they passed out at the rear of the house. They thought they were evading me, but I saw them go, and concluded not to interfere."

The detective explained to the negro about the trail he wanted to strike.

The hound was put upon the scent, and started according to the custom of dogs of his breed to hunt for the trail.

The darky watched him eagerly, but the hound appeared to be at fault.

After running round and round for fully ten minutes, he came and lay down at his master's feet.

"Dat ar dog am boddered," said the negro.

"I reckon that dog is no good."

"No, no, massa; dat am de best hound in dis yere State; but dar ain't no scent for him to take a hold on, dat's what's de matter."

"I have no better scent."

"Ain't yer got an ole shoe or something dat used ter belong to de party yer am arter?"

"I have no better clew."

"Den I guess yer will hab ter gib it up; dis yere dog can't take no scent on nuffin, dat am shuah."

The detective recollected about Belle's garments up in the trunk, and a new scheme struck him.

"Hold on a moment," he said; "may be I can give that cur a better scent."

"Dat ar dog ain't no cur; and ef dat's yer opinion ob Danger, I'se jes' gwine ter take de animal home, dat's all."

The detective entered the house. He found the door bolted on the inside; but as the whole house was but a mere shell, it did not take him long to burst it in.

Once in the house, he started to go upstairs, when a strange sound fell upon his ear.

He stood still and listened in amazement.

It sounded like the tones of some musical instrument, and both instrument and performer were somewhere in that house.

Burgess followed the sound and entered a room on the attic floor.

Again all the curious incidents rushed to his mind, and matter-of-fact man as he was, it did seem to him as though the house was bewitched.

He searched high and low, and could not find either instrument or performer.

He had gone over the house examining the walls for some secret recess, but had found none. It was the most complete case of baffle he had ever encountered.

Level-headed as he was, the constant succession of queer incidents began to confuse him.

"I'll be hanged!" he muttered to himself, "if I haven't a great mind to clear out and drop the whole affair. That girl can never be anything to me, and therefore what interest have I in her fate?"

It was but a momentary fit of discouragement that had come over the brave man.

He went to the room where he had found the stained clothes, and opened the trunk.

A fresh surprise met him.

The clothes were gone; not a vestige of the garments remained.

The detective called to the negro from the window to bring the hound upstairs.

The animal was set to scent the trunk, and after a moment, he put his nose to the floor, uttered a sharp yelp, and started off down the stairs.

"Now, den, dat ar cur am got something, and he's jes' gwine ter show yer what kind ob an animal he am, boss."

The hound stopped at the door leading from the rear of the house. The detective opened the door, and the animal bayed and sprung away upon an open trail.

The detective told Galton to remain and watch the house, while he and the negro followed the dog.

The animal made direct for the clump of trees where the old sexton had met with such a lively experience at the hands of the riders.

The two men followed, and all the time the negro kept repeating:

"I jes' tell yer, boss, dat de dog am gwine ter earn de money for dis yere chile; he am arter something, shuah."

"Yes; he is after something, but I am not sure that he is on the right trail for me."

"He am on de trail yer set him at, boss."

The dog had got far in advance of the men—in fact, he was out of sight, but in a few minutes he was heard to bark in quite a lively manner.

"He hab got 'em, boss!" cried the negro.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE men had hastened forward, and found the dog planted over a spot where the earth had been removed and then restored.

"Golly, boss!" cried the negro, "dat ar dog hab fotched up at a grave."

Iron Burgess made an examination, and discovered that the excavation had not been made any great length of time ago.

He sent the negro back to the sexton's house for a spade. The dog started to follow his master.

With a yell, the negro exclaimed:

"Dar am de riders!" and away he dashed at full speed, followed by his hound.

Dropping upon his hands and knees, Burgess crawled into the bush.

A moment he lay low. There came no other sound, and rising to his feet, he made round for the point whence the negro had given the alarm.

There was an open trail, and the detective started to follow it.

He followed the trail for about half a mile, and came to a house.

It was near daybreak, and for certain reasons he did not wish to operate under the light of the sun. He returned to the sexton's house and found the lawyer, and related what had occurred.

The two men decided to go and dig where the dog had spotted the excavation. They soon reached the spot, and but a foot under the surface discovered the clothing.

"We are arriving at a point," said Burgess, "where the mystery will be solved."

"What suspicion have you now?"

"We have found the house where Susan Blake lives."

"Let's go to the house."

"No; not until to-night."

"By that time all the parties we are seeking will be gone."

"Then we will follow them."

"How can we follow them, if we hide ourselves all day?"

"We will hide in a spot from where we can watch the house of secrets; but first we will return to the sexton's house and get something to eat."

The two men returned to the sexton's house, and in the good wife's pantry found a substantial meal, and had about appeased their appetites, when they were suddenly faced by a new peril.

A party of men had ridden up and had surrounded the house.

Galton looked from the window, and was the first to discover their peril.

"We're gone!" cried the lawyer, in dismay.

The detective was biting at a great hunk of molasses cake as the lawyer uttered the exclamation.

"What is the matter now?" he asked.

"The house is surrounded."

"By daylight?"

"No; by armed men."

Burgess jumped to the window and glanced out.

There were at least a hundred men gathered around the house, and for once the great detective was at bay.

"Follow me!" he cried, and he made a rush for the back door. Day was just breaking.

"Drop on your hands and knees and crawl!" said Burgess.

The two men did drop and crawl, and as luck would have it, managed to reach the little wood-pile in the lower garden

The two men crawled on, and soon reached the cemetery fence. They ran round the latter, when a great shout rose in their rear.

"We have been discovered," said the detective; "they are heading us off."

The detective was led to the conclusion that they were being headed off from the fact that the shouts were heard in the cemetery ahead of them.

"What shall we do now?" asked Galton, trembling from head to foot.

"Prepare for a scrimmage, I reckon," answered Burgess, coolly.

"Can't we run back?"

"And run right into the midst of the gang?"

"What shall we do?"

"Lay low and take all the chances."

The two men did lay low, and were greatly mystified by what followed.

The noise in the cemetery had suddenly ceased, and our hero expected every moment to see a rush of men from some secret covert.

He had no doubt in his own mind but they had been discovered.

The time passed, however, and the rush of armed men did not occur.

Burgess did not understand the matter at all.

"I don't believe they have discovered us," said the lawyer.

"I begin to think so myself."

"Then we can steal off."

"Not so fast."

"Do you wish to wait until we are found?"

"No."

"Why not get away while there is a chance?"

"I am not sure that there is a chance; you wait here, and I will reconnoiter."

"I do not feel bound to remain here."

"You can do as you have a mind to," said Burgess; and he walked away.

The detective had made up his mind that if he and the lawyer had not been discovered, there must be some exciting event that caused the shout of the riders in the cemetery.

The bold man leaped the cemetery fence and stealthily crawled toward the point whence the sounds had come.

It was almost broad daylight, and he soon reached a point whence he could hear the hum of voices. Crawling along, he soon reached a covert from where he could see what was going on; and a sight met his gaze that caused him a greater surprise than all the other incidents and surprises of the night combined.

The riders were gathered in a group around a prisoner, and the detective exclaimed, as his eyes fell upon that prisoner:

"My heavens! what does all this mean?"

The prisoner was a woman, the sexton's wife; but whether the real wife or the false one, Burgess could not tell.

A striking picture was presented at the moment the detective's eyes fell upon the scene.

The woman was upon her knees, with hands uplifted, while a man stood over her.

Burgess was near enough to the party to overhear the conversation.

"Woman, will you confess?"

"What would you have me confess?"

"Where is the girl?"

"What girl?"

"Belle Granger."

"Belle Granger! I do not know where she is."

One of the men came up and whispered a few words to the man who had been cross-examining the prisoner.

The woman was still kneeling with clasped hands, when the man suddenly demanded:

"Who are you, madame?"

"Don't you know? I am the sexton's wife."

"If you are the sexton's wife, why are you in disguise?"

The words came suddenly, and the woman, thrown off her guard, uttered a low cry of alarm.

Iron Burgess heard the strange words, and watched and waited for a wonderful *dénouement*.

A suspicion had previously come across his mind as to the identity of the false Mrs. Beers.

The moment the woman uttered the cry the man exclaimed:

"Aha! it's no use for you to attempt to deceive us, madame; we know you."

The woman leaped to her feet, when the man caught hold of her.

A struggle followed, and during the *mêlée* a wig was torn from the woman's head and one mystery was solved.

The disguised woman was Mrs. Dickson.

The men betrayed considerable excitement upon making the discovery.

Iron Burgess was also greatly excited. The *dénouement* had been no more than he had anticipated, but it was none the less a surprise for the moment.

For a moment the prisoner had been left standing alone.

Quick as a flash the woman suddenly darted away.

As her good fate ordained it, she ran in the direction of the spot where Iron Burgess lay concealed.

The leader of the gang seemed to look upon the escape as a good joke.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

IN the meantime, Mrs. Dickson had run into the shrubbery where our hero lay concealed.

Iron Burgess sprung to the woman's side, and exclaimed:

"Keep right on to the house in the woods."

The detective pursued the same route that had been followed by Mrs. Dickson, and after a few moments he overtook the woman.

"Madame, you have run a narrow risk, but you are safe now?"

"And I owe my life to Alfred Burgess."

"Yes, madame; but had you confided in me, you would not have been in danger."

"Mr. Burgess, when everything is explained, you will know why I did not confide in you."

"I am ready to hear an explanation."

"You shall have it; but come first with me to the house."

"No; I will hear your explanation right here."

"We may be pursued."

"No, madame; the moonshiners have gone away. Their work is done under the cover of darkness; their evil doings will not stand the light of day."

"You say we are safe?"

"The riders have gone, madame."

"Will you come to the house with me?"

"I will join you there."

The detective found the lawyer, told him what had occurred, and the two men proceeded to the house in the woods, which they afterward discovered was located in the new grounds of the cemetery.

Iron Burgess entered the house, and the first person he met was Belle Granger, as radiant and beautiful as ever.

The meeting was very formal on the part of the detective, as he wished to hear several explanations before he talked as of old.

Mrs. Dickson had explained how it appeared from the will that Belle was a married woman.

The uncle who had left her the fortune had supposed her married, and had made the provision as a matter of precaution.

"I am glad to meet you in life," said our hero.

"If you knew," exclaimed Belle, in her most natural and impetuous manner, "how I have suffered, you would not feel any bitterness toward me."

These words melted the detective from his stern demeanor; but before other explanations could follow, the lawyer, Galton, entered the room.

"I claim an introduction to this young lady," exclaimed the lawyer: and he at once demanded an explanation of the mystery of the apparition seen at the window.

"It is easily explained," said Belle. "It was me whom you saw, but I managed to escape from the house before you entered it."

"Will you explain the mystery of the blood-stained clothes?" asked Burgess.

"They were stained in order to deceive my bitterest foes," was the answer.

A few minutes later, and the sexton and his wife and others who were in the secret entered the room.

Before more could be said, the old sexton claimed a right to explain his conduct; and the result proved that he was a true and faithful old man, who had done all he could to save an unprotected woman from a pack of bitter foes.

After having eaten and rested, the detective said:

"I think now that the hour for general explanations has arrived."

"What explanations do you seek?" asked Mrs. Dickson.

"What object had you, madame, in telling me that Belle was dead?"

"I did not tell you that she was dead."

"Did you not tell me to look for her in Spartsville Cemetery?"

"I did."

"Will you please explain this to me?"

"I will. You remember the night you came to see me?"

"I do."

"I was just about to make a revelation."

"You were?"

"At the moment we were interrupted by hearing footsteps."

"I remember."

"I suspected at once that the steps were my husband's."

"Why did you not tell me?"

"I have another explanation to make; you know this is the hour for plain speaking."

"I am listening."

"Belle is an heiress."

The detective knew the latter fact, but looking very demure and innocent, he remarked:

"I am sorry to hear that."

"Thank you," cried Belle.

"I will have an explanation to make," said the detective, with a queer expression upon his face.

"I am Belle's heir at law," continued Mrs. Dickson.

"And is that the only reason why you wished to make me believe that she was dead?"

"No."

"The mystery deepens, madame."

"My husband was an avaricious man; I blush to own it, but the truth must be spoken."

"Ah, I see! the game was played to deceive him?"

"To save the dear girl's life."

"But why should you deceive me?"

"This house, as well as the sexton's, stands in the cemetery grounds."

"Ah! I begin to see"

"Belle was concealed in one or the other of these houses all the time."

"Why didn't that good man there tell me so?"

"As I told you before, until this moment he believed you an agent of the parties who were seeking the girl's life."

Burgess suggested that all further explanations should be adjourned until the following morning.

Upon the morning following the incidents above related, Iron Burgess, the great detective, came forth from the house, intending to take a stroll and calmly revolve over in his mind all the events of the past.

He was a proud man, and yet he was in a dilemma.

"I am no beggar," he said, talking to himself. "I am no seeker for the bounty of an heiress;" and, still speaking in an audible tone, he concluded:

"I shall go away."

As the last words fell from his lips, he was startled by hearing a voice quite near to him inquire:

"Where are you going? why are you going? and won't you wait to say good-bye?" came the voice; and the several inquiries were spoken in a playful tone, and followed by a ripple of merry laughter.

The detective was standing near a clump of shrubbery. He stepped toward it and pulled the bushes aside, and there stood revealed the lovely face and form of Belle Granger.

"Belle!"

"Alfred!" were the two exclamations that followed.

"Are you really going away?" said Belle, looking at the stern face of the detective in an arch manner.

"Belle, are you trifling with me?"

"Won't you let me go with you?"

"Girl, what has come over you?"

"Why do you not answer my question?"

The detective suddenly leaped forward, and catching the girl in his arms, he exclaimed:

"Shall I answer your question in my own way?"

The ready answer came:

"Yes."

The detective clasped the lovely girl in his arms and imprinted a kiss upon her cheek.

"Dearest girl, this is the happiest hour of my life."

"And you will not go away?"

"Oh, yes; but you shall go with me."

Dear reader, our duty lies in recounting the adventures of our hero, and the love-making we are compelled to leave to your own imaginations.

We have placed all the facts before you, and it only remains for us to detail the after experience of a few of the characters in our story.

Jasper Knight is in Texas, trying his hand at stock-raising; Mose and Peter, the two negroes, are settled in the State of New Jersey. The whisky business has not been revived in the section where our hero operated, but a large number of men are under bail for trial for various crimes committed before and after the advent of the Iron Detective.

And how about the detective? Well, he is down in the region where his great exploits occurred; but the understanding is that, when his services as a witness for the Government are concluded, a certain notable wedding is to occur, and then there will be a vacancy on the Government force, as a certain prospective bride claims that the man of iron has encountered perils enough for one life-time.

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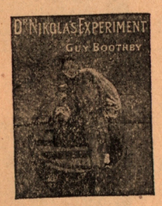

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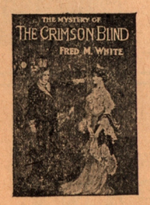

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THE FOLLOWING NUMBERS ARE NOW OUT:

No. 1. THE RETURN OF OLD SLEUTH, THE DETECTIVE, or The Great Philadelphia Mystery.
No. 2. THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING MILLIONS, - or Tracked by a Great Detective.
No. 3. THE SECRET OF THE HAUNTED HOUSE, - or The Great Detective's Tragic Find.
No. 4. THE KING OF ALL DETECTIVES, - - - or Young Jack Sleuth on the Trail.
No. 5. THE GIANT DETECTIVE'S LAST SHADOW, A Tale of Herculean Detective Adventures.
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No. 7. THE VEILED BEAUTY, - - - - or The Mystery of the California Heiress.
No. 8. THE MYSTERY OF THE SPANIARD'S VENDETTA, or A Great Detective's Marvelous Strategy.
No. 9. THE GREAT BOND ROBBERY, - - - - or Tracked by a Female Detective.
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No. 12. SHADOWED TO HIS DOOM, - - - - or Foiled by the Yankee Detective.
No. 13. TRAPPING THE COUNTERFEITERS, - - or The Lightning Detective on the Trail.

PUBLISHED ON FRIDAY

Oct. 2—No. 14. TRAILED BY THE WALL STREET DETECTIVE, or Badger's Midnight Quest.
Oct. 9—No. 15. THE IRISH DETECTIVE'S GREATEST CASE, or The Strategy of O'Neil McDarragh.
Oct. 16—No. 16. THE GREATEST MYSTERY OF THE AGE, or Saved by the Gipsy Detective.
Oct. 23—No. 17. TRAPPING THE MOONSHINERS, or The Strange Adventures of a Government Detective in the Tennessee Mountains.
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Nov. 6—No. 19. THE MYSTERY OF THE BLACK TRUNK, - or Manfred's Strange Quest.
Nov. 13—No. 20. THE CHIEF OF THE COUNTERFEITERS, or The Boy Detective's Greatest Haul.
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Nov. 27—No. 22. THE BEAUTIFUL CRIMINAL, - or The New York Detective's Strangest Case.
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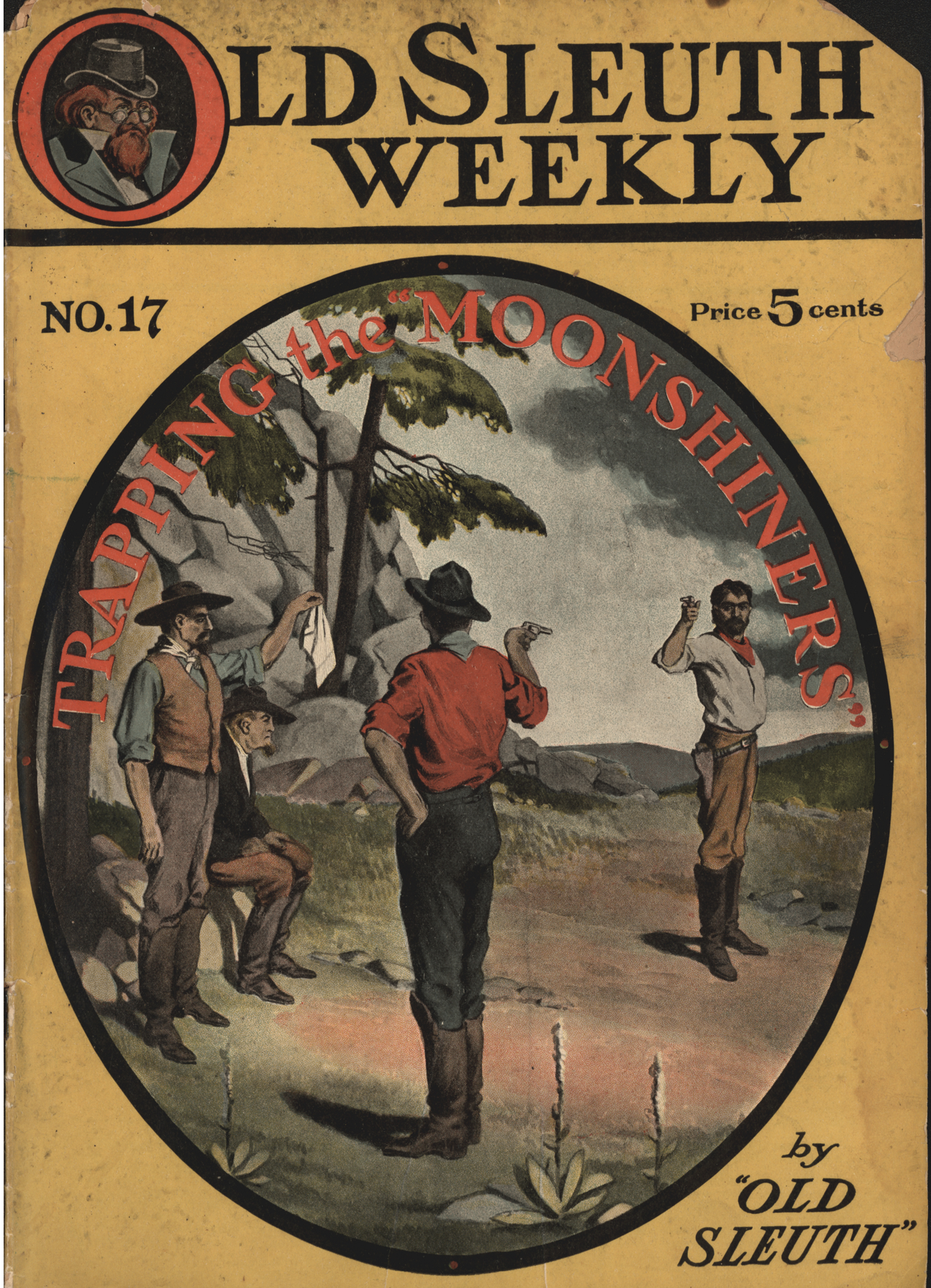
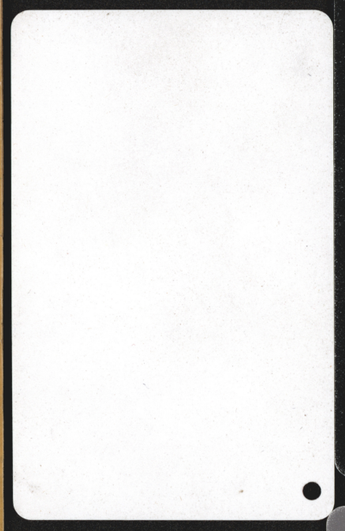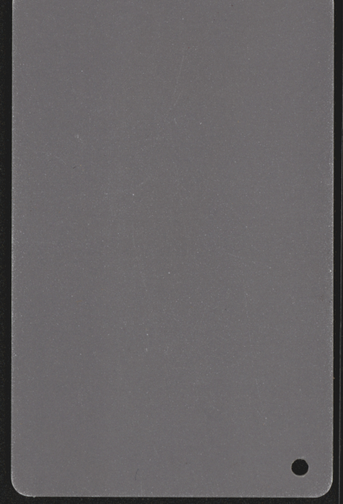
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